

SPECIAL REPORT

Japan's security strategy

A S P I



Dr Thomas Wilkins

July 2022

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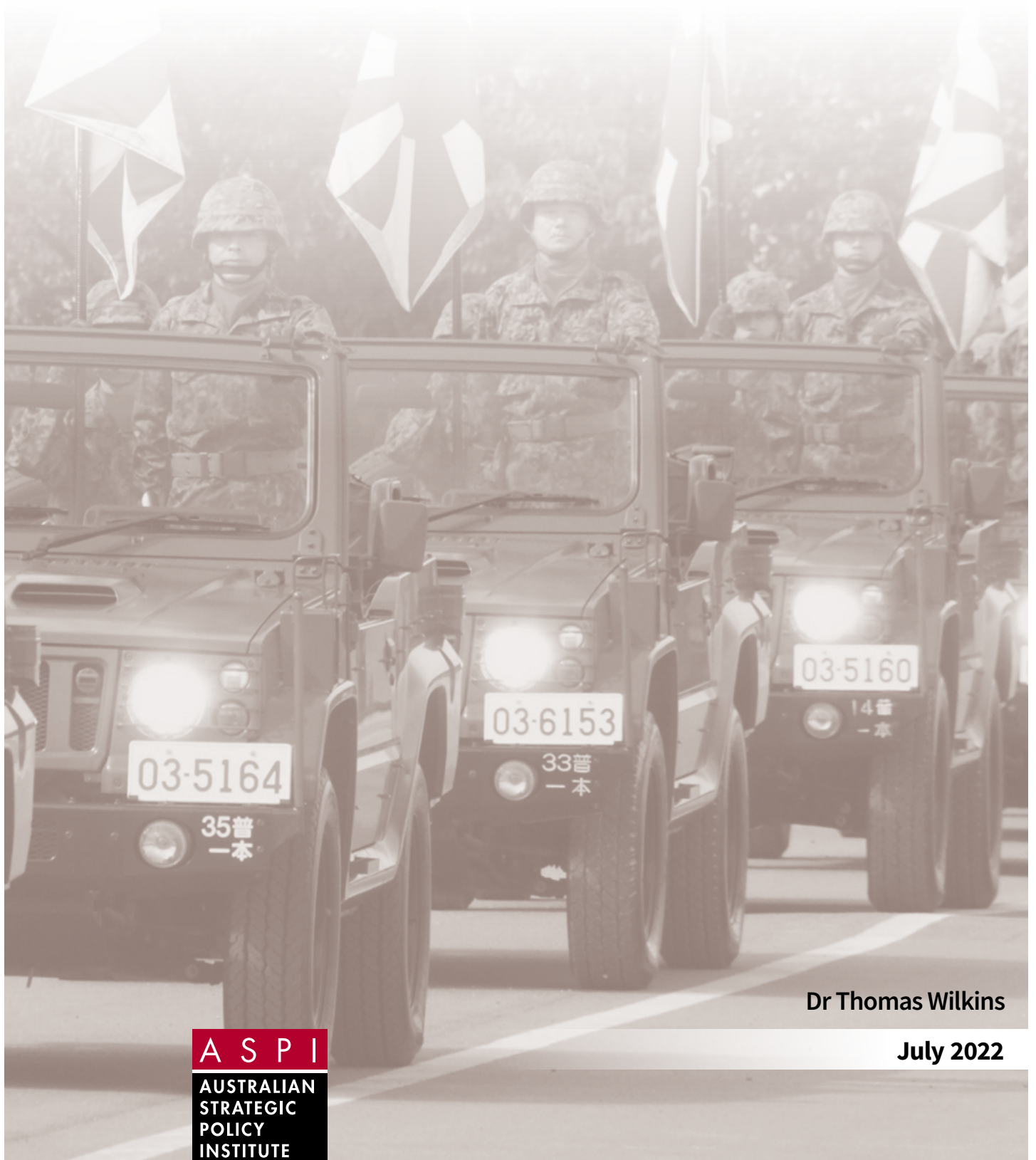
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Executive summary

Japan is facing unprecedented security challenges and risks to its national security not experienced since the Cold War. The country presently feels itself under ever-increasing military pressure from its near neighbours in Northeast Asia. North Korea continues to send threatening signals to Tokyo, backed by mounting nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities and proliferation, while the Russian Federation has augmented its military deployments in the disputed Northern Territories (the Kuril Islands) and routinely sends warplanes to circle the Japanese archipelago. But Japan feels most menaced by the rising power and assertiveness of the People's Republic of China, which relentlessly tests Japanese sovereignty over the disputed Senkaku Islands (which are administered by Tokyo) and continues to undermine the rules-based regional order that Japan is committed to, especially in the maritime arena. Therefore, Japan feels itself positioned on the 'front line' of a volatile neighbourhood.

Concurrently, Japanese policymakers are cognisant of the rapid developments occurring in regard to technological competition, regional arms build-ups and elevated activities in the space, cyber and electromagnetic domains. Practices such as 'grey zone' operations or 'hybrid warfare' are probable outcomes of such developments. This comes at a time when doubts are being raised about the capacity and willingness of the US to honour its alliance commitments and safeguard the regional order, and when Japan's bilateral relations with the Republic of Korea are in diplomatic deep freeze.

In order to squarely respond to the increasingly severe security environment surrounding Japan, *Tokyo has sought to progressively craft a well-defined and cohesive security strategy* over the past decade that will safeguard its interests and values. The marked degree of coordination between the political, diplomatic, security, defence and military aspects of that strategy is striking and provides lessons for partners such as Australia.

A thorough account of Japan's synergistic approach must encompass three integral components: the diplomatic superstructure that steers strategy; Japan's internal efforts to better mobilise its national resources; and its external alignment practices. By piecing those elements together, a clearer picture of Japan's revitalised 'identity' as a security actor will be revealed.

The *diplomatic dimension* begins with the 2016 promulgation of the flagship Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) policy, which now emphatically serves as an overarching policy framework that superintends the associated security/strategic policies that flow behind it. Ultimately, the FOIP policy is Japan's stated 'vision' for the building and maintenance of a regional rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. The significance of the policy can't be overstated, since it represents a significant departure from Japan's historically low-key and passive role in shaping regional order, which was previously confined to broad support for the American-led liberal international order. The FOIP policy is a serious bid by Japan to provide regional leadership through creative but practical policy on its own account—partially distinct from its US ally—and alongside new regional partners.

Within this broader diplomatic context, and in order to fulfil the security-related aims integral to the FOIP policy, the Japanese Government has enacted *a far-ranging process of internal security reform*. 2013 saw the establishment of a new National Security Council (with a National Security Advisor and National Security Secretariat), and the country's first ever National Security Strategy was released concurrently. Those instruments set in motion a more

effective, streamlined and responsive national security apparatus centred on the Prime Minister and cabinet. In 2015, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe also vigorously pushed through a package of significant security reforms as part of the new Peace and Security Legislation. Most prominently, the reforms enable the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) to conduct ‘collective self-defence’ alongside allies and partners if the country’s security is directly endangered and establish the legal protocols for the military defence of Japan.

To support this new posture, *Japan is undertaking a comprehensive restructure of its ‘defence architecture’*, including by streamlining and improving defence procurement and national arms production. This provides the necessary foundation for *Tokyo’s stated intention to create a ‘multi-domain defense force’* that has the capacity to seamlessly integrate the ‘new domains’ of space, cyber and the electromagnetic spectrum into its more traditional land–sea–air force structure and consequent operational outlook. In order to realise a multidomain defense force, Japan’s force structure is evolving alongside cumulative improvements in capability. New or strengthened military capabilities include, most prominently, stand-off/strike capabilities, an amphibious brigade and the conversion of existing ‘helicopter destroyers’ into *de facto* ‘multi-role’ aircraft carriers. Each is a major step, and the cumulative effect is powerful.

Such actions are designed ‘To ensure national security, [since] Japan needs to first and foremost *strengthen its own capabilities and the foundation for exercising those capabilities*’,¹ but they also implicitly telegraph that Japan increasingly perceives military power as a valid and necessary instrument of statecraft once more. This is further assisted by the improved reputation of the JSDF in the aftermath of the ‘3.11’ triple disaster,² which created a more positive image of the armed forces inside Japan than was typical in the past. While improvements in capabilities and the capacity to exercise them contribute to Japan’s pivotal alliance partnership with the US, they also indicate tentative steps towards more self-reliance in its defence posture—a (very limited) ‘hedge’ against the (remote) possibility of ‘abandonment’ under complex circumstances or contingencies in which the level of support by the US is less than expected or desired. Those steps also make Japan a more powerful ally and partner.

There’s also an external alignment orientation geared towards *advancing Japan’s national security strategy in combination with allies and partners*, since policymakers in Tokyo are cognisant that the country’s resources alone are insufficient to confront the overwhelming security challenges it faces. This is especially true as the country’s economic growth languishes, and it, like many nations, faces a plethora of other challenges, such as demographic decline and an ageing society. For that reason, the National Security Strategy declares that ‘Japan needs to *expand and deepen cooperative relationships with other countries, with the Japan–US Alliance as the cornerstone*’.³ Notwithstanding Tokyo’s discomfiture with some of Washington’s policies and pronouncements under the Trump administration, the unveiling of the 2019 US Indo-Pacific Strategy, including its gratifying adoption of the FOIP principle, provided some strategic reassurance. The Biden administration has also underlined its determination to return to global and regional leadership and to accord allies more consideration, as expressed in the new Indo-Pacific Strategy document of 2022.⁴ The alliance remains essential, and the military–strategic aspects of the Japan–US alliance continue to be strengthened and upgraded.

Nevertheless, prudence has motivated Japanese policymakers to *actively seek out new security partners* to expand cooperation beyond exclusive reliance on the American alliance. Such new security collaboration has typically occurred under the ‘strategic partnership’ mechanism—a means of steadily enhancing diplomatic, security and defence ties without formal treaty instruments. The acquisition of a wide range of new strategic partners across the Indo-Pacific region and beyond testifies to the salience of this new alignment trajectory for Japan. Indeed, with key partners, such as Australia, India and several Southeast Asian states (including Vietnam, the Philippines and Singapore), Tokyo has harnessed the ‘Indo-Pacific’ construct and the FOIP principle to serve as common platforms for strategic engagement. Meanwhile, Tokyo’s ‘quiet, but close’ relationship with Taiwan has also gained new prominence after unprecedented official declaratory support for the beleaguered island nation.

Among Japan’s new strategic partnerships, the *bilateral relationship with Australia stands out as an exemplar*. This was the first instance of tangible security cooperation that Japan embarked upon outside of the US alliance and is the most developed and successful to date. Since the foundational Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation

in 2007, Japan and Australia have knitted together their diplomatic, security and defence policies and engaged in progressive defence/military cooperation through that mechanism. The Japan–Australia Special Strategic Partnership, as it's officially known, has now become an integral feature of both countries' responses to regional challenges. The long-awaited signing of the Reciprocal Access Agreement in January 2022 further facilitates military cooperation and represents another important step forward for bilateral relations.⁵

This special report demonstrates the extraordinary proactivity of Japan towards issues of regional order-building, security and defence policy, and military capability development, and teases out the implications for Australia as a closely aligned partner. I collate and present a wide range of disparate official source documentation and thematic analyses to render an appraisal of Japan's security strategy in a comprehensive but digestible format. I conclude that, while Japanese activity in the security sphere has been unprecedented and prolific, Canberra must also be aware of certain limitations in terms of resources, and political caveats to Japan becoming a 'normal country' or *bona fide* 'great power'. Canberra, too, must be a creative, practical policymaker if the full benefits of the deepening special strategic partnership with Japan are to contribute to a truly free and open Indo-Pacific.

Introduction

For most of the Cold War and beyond, Japan's security strategy was rather low-profile, and observers found it difficult to accurately discern any coherent organising concept behind it. This is emphatically no longer the case, as an initial review of government documents illustrates.⁶ The *National Security Strategy* document first appeared in 2013 (it's due for renewal around 2023) and provides guiding principles for Japan's evolving security and defence posture.⁷ Recent updates have been outlined in the *National Defense Program Guidelines for 2019 and beyond* (NDPGs, 2018) and the *Medium Term Defense Program 2019–2023*,⁸ overseen by the Japanese Ministry of Defense (MOD), which also issues annual defence *Defense of Japan* white papers. These pivotal documents are also set against the broader foreign and diplomatic policies and initiatives emanating from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which also publishes an annual white paper, the *Diplomatic Bluebook*. Taken together, these documents constitute the essence of Japan's overall security strategy and exhibit a remarkable degree of coordination. They form the basis for this report's objective of outlining, analysing and evaluating Japan's contemporary security strategy.

The forging of a more robust and effective security strategy comes in response to the acute regional challenges that Japan faces, and those challenges form this report's point of departure. Japan inhabits a threat-rich security environment in Northeast Asia, confronted by neighbours with expansive and growing military capabilities and less than benign intentions. The most salient challenges to be examined here come from China, North Korea and, to a lesser degree, Russia (including Sino-Russian strategic cooperation, which seems to be strengthening even in the midst of Putin's war in Ukraine). Furthermore, I draw attention to the dynamic nature of strategic and military competition through the extension of 'traditional' land-sea-air operations into the newer domains of space, cybertechnology and the electromagnetic spectrum. New techniques of 'hybrid warfare', 'grey zone' brinkmanship and peacetime cyberattacks leveraging new domains further complicate the picture. I also briefly note non-traditional security threats, such as terrorism, climate change, natural disasters and challenges to human security.

In analysing Japan's strategic responses to those challenges, I concentrate on three interlocking themes.

First, this report reveals how *Japan has recently assumed a more productive role in the building and maintenance of the Indo-Pacific regional order*. Notably, Japan was one of the first countries to adopt the 'Indo-Pacific' regional construct in order to demarcate its primary area of strategic interest. The launch of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) 'vision' in 2016 was a significant departure from Japan's previous low-key posture as a relatively passive supporter of the American-led liberal international order. Under then Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, Japan stepped up to provide a degree of regional leadership previously considered unthinkable to advance its own formula for regional order-building.

Second, the report examines *how Japan's prodigious internal efforts, such as security reforms, revised defence architecture and augmented military capabilities, serve its security strategy* (in tandem with the FOIP policy). Recent years have witnessed what scholars have dubbed a 'renaissance' in Japan's security and defence affairs, marked by vigorous debates in the Japanese strategic community and policymaking sphere, and resulting in unprecedented momentum in policy formation and legislation. The establishment of a dedicated National Security Council and National Security Advisor based on the US model in 2013 (at the time of the National Security Strategy's release)

has further improved coordination among relevant ministries and centralised power at the Office of the Prime Minister (*kantei*). This has greatly enhanced Japan's rapid decision-making capacity in response to security crises. New laws have been introduced to loosen restraints on Japanese defence and military activities, most prominently the 2015 Peace and Security Legislation, which permits the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) to engage in collective self-defence with allied parties (under heavily circumscribed conditions). Japan's defence architecture is also being revamped to overcome 'siloing' between service branches and organs of government and improve defence procurement and arms production.

In the light of that reformed security and defence mandate, I then proceed to outline *how Japan has sought to modernise and improve the military capabilities of its armed forces through the creation of a 'multi-domain defense force'*. The JSDF is being reconfigured and supplied accordingly to deter or confront threats emanating from the new domains of space, cybertechnology and the electromagnetic spectrum, in tandem with qualitative improvements in land-sea-air capabilities. I consider how Japan's military doctrine and strategy have been adjusted accordingly, towards a more 'offensively defensive' posture, by extending its reach, for example through carrier aviation and a range of stand-off strike capabilities. Increasingly, Japanese planners are seeking to reorient territorial defence away from the reactive posture of the past to a more proactive military-defensive stance in which assets are being redeployed from the north of the country to meet potential threats at the southern end of the archipelago (the *Nansei-shotō* island chain, pivoting on Okinawa). Whether this reflects a move towards greater self-reliance in defence posture is debatable, however, as the US alliance still remains cardinal, especially in terms of extended (nuclear) deterrence.

Third, the report explores *how Japan has sought to leverage external security alignments to reinforce its security strategy* in recognition of the 'Emergence of security challenges, which cannot be dealt with by a single country alone'.⁹ Thus, I briefly examine how Japan is enhancing its alliance cooperation with the US, based upon the 2015 *Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation*, and making greater efforts to improve joint military planning for crisis contingencies. At the same time, Tokyo has engaged in prolific efforts to reduce its exclusive dependency upon its US ally by extending its security horizons to build associations with new parties under the 'strategic partnership' mechanism. Japan has significantly invested in new strategic partners that include not only Australia, but India and a range of Southeast Asian countries (including Vietnam, the Philippines and Singapore), and also international organisations such as the EU. The 'Indo-Pacific' concept and FOIP policy are specifically designed to exploit convergences with such partners and achieve concrete outcomes that support the Japanese security strategy. Some of those partners are concentrated in 'minilateral' forms of cooperation, such as the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue and the Japan-US-Australia-India Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad).

The report then focuses on *the Japan-Australia Special Strategic Partnership in further detail as an exemplar* of this new mechanism for enhanced bilateral cooperation. I highlight the range of activities it encompasses and argue that the accumulated progress in building security and defence ties to date provides a firm foundation for more ambitious goals in the future.

In the final section, I sketch out some of the implications of Japan's new security activism for Australia. Japan's security posture is changing faster than analysts are accustomed to, so it's vital that we take stock of both cumulative and recent developments to better understand what contribution it can make to regional security, and how that can benefit Australia, as policymakers think through Australian responses.

Historical background

The scope and significance of the changes underway in Japan's security strategy can't be fully grasped without some familiarity with the historical context. Many of the historical observations below continue to inform or shape current policy, while some have been overturned. This reflects continuities and changes in Japan's 'security identity' and 'strategic culture'.

After its breakneck modernisation during the Meiji period and its failed bid to carve out an Asia-Pacific empire in World War II, a chastened Japan retreated into a national shell as it sought to rebuild from the ruins. That experience left deep scars in the national psyche, including an aversion to war and militarism that prevails to the present day.¹⁰ The Pacific War also bequeathed a legacy of historical animosity towards Japan's revitalisation as a military actor in the region, and that animosity persists in parts of the region today, principally in China and the two Koreas. A quasi-'pacifist' stance was also enshrined in the US-imposed Constitution (including Article IX, which appears to outlaw the right to belligerency). As a result, Japan was content during the postwar period to concentrate on rebuilding its shattered economy, safe under the protection of the US Security Treaty guarantee of 1951 (revised in 1960). This dependent posture became known as the 'Yoshida Doctrine'—named after Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida (1946–47, 1948–54)—and was maintained even as the country charted its rise to economic dominance in Asia from the 1960s onwards.

After American occupation ended in 1952, the JSDF (*Jieitai* in Japanese) was founded in 1954 (amalgamating a variety of 'national safety forces') and operated under the 1957 Basic Policy for National Defense (*Kokubō no Kihon Hoshin*).¹¹ Historically, given the raw memories of World War II, the reputation of the JSDF was rather negative among many politicians and the general public. As a consequence, Japan eschewed overseas military involvements in favour of offering general support for the Western-led international order while concentrating on mercantilist gains. Japan supported the American 'forward presence' in Asia, from which the US projected power in the Korean and Vietnam wars. Cut off from its traditional markets in China (Sino-Japanese relations weren't normalised until 1972), it made limited attempts to shape the Asia-Pacific region economically through the 'Fukuda Doctrine' (named after Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, 1976–78), particularly in respect to leading the emerging economies of Southeast Asia (the so-called 'flying geese' model). This had a significant impact over time on Japan's integration into the Southeast Asian region and served to largely overcome any lingering historical issues, such that Japan presently enjoys a highly positive reputation in the region, around which it has been able to forge new bilateral partnerships.

For the remainder of the Cold War, Japan maintained a low security profile by focusing on its vast economic power as its primary tool of statecraft and became characterised unkindly as a 'reactive' state.¹² Under the continuance of the Yoshida Doctrine and out of deference to residual sensitivities to its historically belligerent conduct, Japan even began to *self-impose* further constraints on its defence and military potential, including the 'three non-nuclear principles' (non-possession, non-production and non-introduction of nuclear weapons), the prohibition of arms exports, and a nominal 1% of GDP ceiling on defence budgets. The first of those three constraints remains in place today, but the last two have been relaxed.

Nevertheless, as the economy soared, defence spending and military capabilities increased markedly through a sequence of 'defense build-up plans'. The first *National Defense Program Guidelines* (NDPGs) were released in 1976 and enshrined the Basic Defense Force Concept (*Kibanteki Bōeiryoku Kōsō*), which set the parameters for Japan's national defence against Soviet attack. Shortly thereafter, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone (1982–87) made limited attempts to improve the JSDF's 'self-reliance', slightly exceeding the 1% of GDP ceiling for defence spending, even as it remained tightly coupled to the US. Indeed, in the face of the Soviet naval build-up in the Pacific, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) developed a powerful antisubmarine warfare capability, and Japan's military establishment grew to around a quarter of a million active personnel. At the peak of Japan's economic pre-eminence in the 1980s, observers began to ponder how long that anomalous situation would last and whether Japan would finally resume the role of a 'normal' great power.

The end of the Cold War and the Gulf War of 1991 up-ended those longstanding cosy assumptions about Japanese security strategy. Stung by foreign deprecation of its purely financial contribution (US\$13 billion) to the UN coalition that ejected Iraqi forces from Kuwait as 'chequebook diplomacy', and musing on whether the US would maintain its defence commitment to Japan after the collapse of the Soviet threat, Japan entered a period of strategic introspection. Policymakers cast around for alternative approaches that would comport with Japan's non-military-centred security culture. The Higuchi Report of 1994 explored a focus on 'human security' as part of a new understanding of 'comprehensive security' beyond the traditional military-territorial emphasis and highlighted peacekeeping operations as a priority.¹³ It also sought to put a premium on regional multilateral dialogue forums, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum.¹⁴ In 1995, Japan released another iteration of the NDPGs, followed by a *Review of the Guidelines for US–Japan Defense Cooperation* in 1997. Yet, as it became clearer that Japan's economic 'bubble' had truly burst, giving way to stagnation over 'lost decades', its strongest tools of influence came at a discount. At that time, China's economy, with prodigious Japanese assistance, took off.

As it became increasingly clear that Japan's economic and security environment was changing rapidly, Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi (2001–06) began to undertake significant domestic reforms, including in the security sphere (the 'Koizumi Doctrine') in a bid to reinvigorate the country's flagging fortunes and raise its 'international contribution' (*kokusai kōka*). From the end of the Cold War onwards, security reforms began to accumulate, including the pivotal International Peace Cooperation Law (1992), the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law (2001) and the Contingency Legislation (*Yūji Hōji*) (2003), the production of the NDPGs (2004) and, significantly, the upgrading of the Japan Defense Agency to a fully-fledged Ministry of Defense (MOD) in 2007. It was around this time that Japan began to seek out new security partnerships across the region, beginning with Australia—a process that has since been greatly extended.

The near-complete dominance of the ('conservative') Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Japan since World War II was briefly interrupted by a chaotic term of government by the ('progressive') Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) between 2009 and 2012 (the DPJ was dissolved in 2016). The DPJ made efforts to engage with and conciliate China to resolve security tensions between the two, while distancing Japan from Washington in favour of a putative 'East Asian Community', including an amorphous concept of 'fraternal diplomacy' (*yūai gaikō*). In 2010, new NDPGs were issued in which the 'Dynamic Joint Defense Force' (*Dainamikkuna kyōdō bōei-tai*) was introduced to improve combined arms cooperation and flexibility, away from the 'static' dispositions of the Basic Defence Force concept. However, any radical recalibration of the Japanese security posture was abruptly halted by a diplomatic crisis over the Senkaku Islands in 2010 (triggered by the collision of a Chinese fishing trawler and a Japan Coast Guard vessel) and the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake triple disaster.¹⁵ No outstanding progress was achieved by the DPJ, but prior security directions quietly continued.¹⁶

In 2012, the LDP was returned to power along with (former) Prime Minister Shinzō Abe (2006–07, 2012–20). Abe, who was conceived as a nationalist and historical revisionist and was thus underestimated by some (he sought to revise the Japanese Constitution unsuccessfully), gave new direction to Japan in all aspects of national policy, especially security, under the slogan 'Japan is back'.¹⁷ Under his long period in office, a putative 'Abe Doctrine'¹⁸

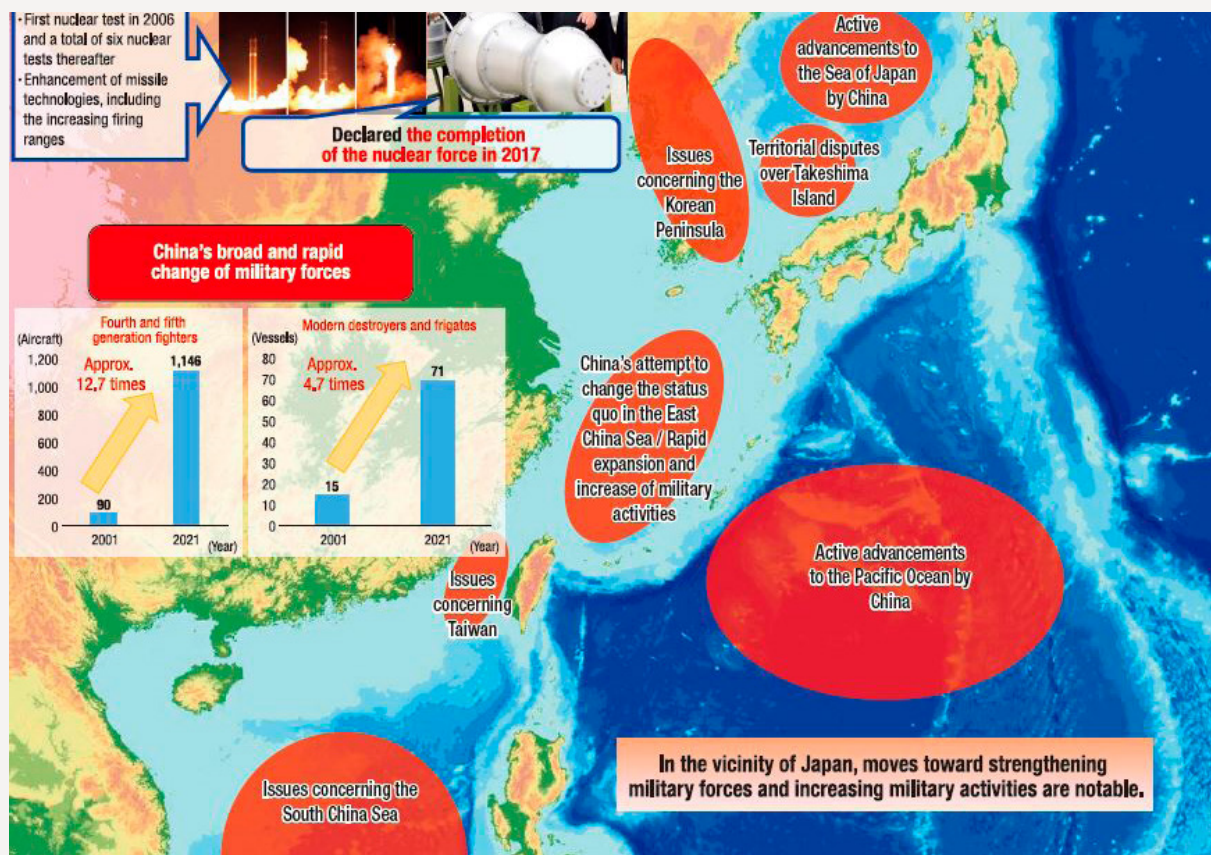
was enunciated through a raft of further significant security legislation, a refocusing and strengthening of defence capabilities, and taking existing alliances and strategic partnerships to new heights. Many commentators have suggested that this activity added up to a new 'grand strategy' for Japan.¹⁹ With Abe's legacy firmly imprinted on Japanese security strategy and likely to continue under the new LDP Premier Fumio Kishida (who quickly displaced his predecessor, Yoshihide Suga, in October 2021), it is at this juncture that an analysis of contemporary developments must commence.

Now, even though Japan is no longer the dominant economic power in Asia, it still commands formidable resources, including a GDP of around US\$5 trillion (the world's third largest), compared to China's US\$14.7 trillion. As the regional balance of power continues to shift away, according to the *Lowy Institute Asian Power Index*, from Japan (38.7) and its US ally (82.2) and towards the People's Republic of China (74.6),²⁰ Japan remains uneasily poised between becoming a 'secondary' power and leveraging its retained great-power attributes to greater effect to remain a 'Tier One country'.²¹ Security has taken on a greater salience in Japan's national policy debate, although it must be set against competing priorities such as continued economic stagnation, an ageing society and a residual attachment to pacifism in domestic politics.²² Those factors bear upon its security strategy, sometimes in unexpected ways. Japanese efforts to craft a new security 'identity' for itself, as expressed in its national security strategy, remain a work in progress.

Part 1: Challenges

Japan's threat assessment: 'an increasingly severe security environment'

Figure 1: Regional security environment surrounding Japan



- Countries in this region abound in political, economic, ethnic, and religious diversity and views on security and the perceptions of threats are different by country.
 - A regional cooperation framework in the security realm has not been sufficiently institutionalized. (⇔ NATO's collective defense in Europe)
 - Longstanding issues of territorial rights and reunification in this region continue to remain. (e.g. Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, South China Sea)
- Inter-state competition across the political, economic and military realms is prominently emerging in recent years.
 - Gray-zone situations may increase and expand, which harbors the risk of developing into graver situations.

(Note) Figures for modern destroyers and frigates for China show the total number of Renhai-class, Luhai-class, Luhai-class, Sovremenny-class, Luyang-class, and Luzhou-class destroyers and Jiangwei-class and Jiangkai-class frigates. Additionally, China has 50 Jiangdao-class corvettes (in 2021).

Policymakers in Tokyo have consistently pointed to the ‘increasingly severe security environment’ that surrounds Japan in Northeast Asia. Facing relentless pressure on its maritime boundaries and airspace from China and Russia, while a nuclear-armed North Korea looms in the background, Tokyo has increasingly sought to confront the unwelcome prospect of attacks upon its national territory for the first time since the Cold War ended (see Figure 1). As regional tensions mount, backed by intensive military build-ups, the possibility of unintended incidents or miscalculations sparking a regional conflict has risen.

The People’s Republic of China

Hinata-Yamaguchi states that ‘China is and will continue to be the primary security threat.’²³ Japanese policymakers view the rise of Chinese economic power, coupled with China’s increasingly ‘assertive’ pattern of behaviour, as destabilising to the regional order. The 2021 *Defense of Japan White Paper* states that ‘strategic competition may become more exposed and intense among countries intending to create international and regional orders more preferable to themselves and to expand their influence.’²⁴ China’s construction and subsequent militarisation of artificial features in the South China Sea, its relentless incursions into Japanese maritime zones in the East China Sea and the *Nansei-shotō* (‘southern island chain’) archipelago, as well as its practice of economic coercion (such as its 2010 suspension of the supply of rare earths to Japan), have rung alarm bells. This comes at a time when the regional military balance is shifting away from Japan and its US ally towards China. Inspired by ‘Xi Jinping Thought of a Strong Military’, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has made great strides in its capabilities, including significantly closing the technological gap with the most advanced regional militaries.²⁵ Japanese defence policymakers note the rapid gains in qualitative and quantitative terms and also express continued concerns over ‘transparency’. They have identified China’s marked determination to achieve technological advantages through ‘civil–military fusion’ and accelerated competition in advanced areas such as artificial intelligence (AI), hypersonics and other missile capabilities.²⁶

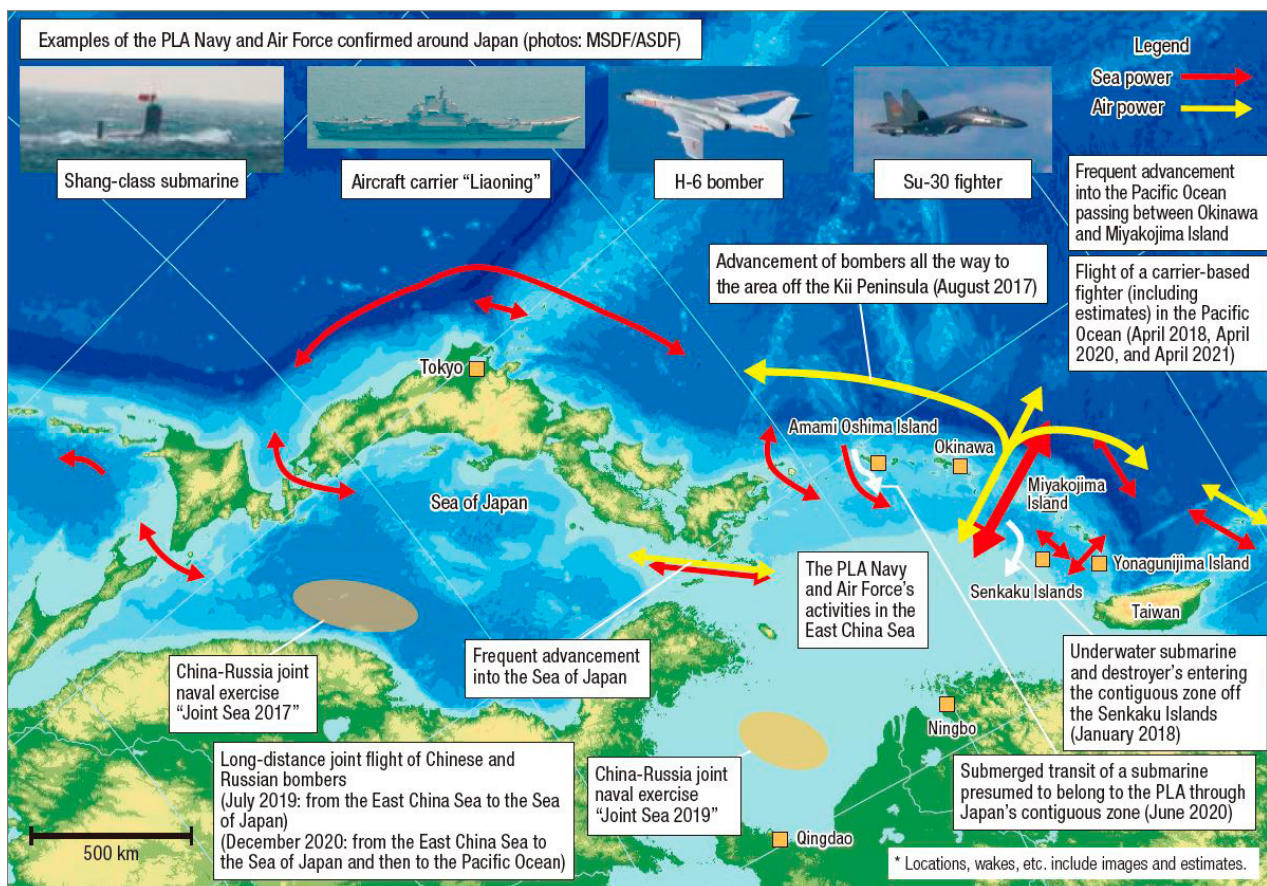
Tokyo policymakers view Japan as being at the ‘front line’ of Chinese assertiveness, and the Japanese Government has remarked that ‘China has relentlessly continued attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by coercion in the sea area around the Senkaku Islands, leading to a grave matter of concern.’²⁷ Tokyo is intently focused upon the maritime activities of the PLA Navy and the China Coast Guard, although Chinese warplanes are a frequent presence in Japan’s exclusive economic zone and air defence identification zone, causing a cycle of persistent intercept scrambles by the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF), now cumulatively numbering over 30,000 in total (see Figure 2). Beijing even declared a national air defence identification zone of its own covering the islands in 2013—a declaration that Japan and the US have largely ignored, at least in military terms. The introduction of the new China Coast Guard Law in February 2021 has further exacerbated Japanese anxieties. Of special concern are ambiguities of the new legislation in relation to international law, interpretations of geographical remit, and the authorised use of weapons. Such maritime pressure, including the use of fishing fleets as proxy ‘maritime militias’, present grey-zone dangers to Japan’s territorial integrity—actions that apply pressure in peacetime, but fall below the threshold of overt warfare.

Closely connected to this direct threat to Japan are the issues of the South China Sea, where similar dynamics apply, and the possibility that Beijing may seek to resolve the Taiwan issue by force. In the case of the former, expanded military activities and facilities on islands in the South China Sea, several of which are territorially disputed among a variety of Southeast Asian claimant states, mirrors Japan’s national predicament in the East China Sea. Beijing’s defiance of the Permanent Court of Arbitration’s ruling in favour of the Philippines in 2016 also strikes at Japan’s attachment to international law as a fundamental anchor of a rules-based order.

China has likewise intensified military activity and asymmetric pressures (such as cyber and disinformation attacks) on the island of Taiwan. For the first time, Tokyo has now officially declared that ‘Stabilizing the situation surrounding Taiwan is important for Japan’s security and the stability of the international community.’²⁸ Beijing reacted sharply to that, and relations were strained further when former Deputy Prime Minister Tarō Asō made stronger remarks on Japan’s commitment to Taipei (which were later echoed by former Prime Minister Abe).

Nevertheless, it's important to note that Taipei has prominent supporters in the ruling LDP, known as the 'Taiwan tribe' (*Taiwan-zoku*), including not only Asō, but Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi (Abe's younger brother), and that Tokyo and Taipei enjoy close but muted relations and have parallel security interests.²⁹ Indeed, Taiwan's integrity is viewed as strategically vital to Japan's own security. The island sits at a crucial geostrategic point in the 'first island chain' only 110 kilometres from the Ryūkyū archipelago (with overlapping air defence identification zones). Hostile forces deployed in the island would endanger Japan's southern flank and render joint US and Japanese military installations in Okinawa extremely vulnerable.

Figure 2: PLA's recent activities in the surrounding sea area and airspace of Japan



Source: MOD, *Defence of Japan 2021*, page 18.

North Korea

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korea, is also identified as posing 'grave and imminent threats to Japan's security', in the words of Defense Minister Kishi.³⁰ The DPRK has made significant strides in its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs in recent years. Pyongyang has conducted six nuclear tests to date and repeatedly test-fired ballistic missiles over Japanese territory (in 1998, 2017 and 2021). Military parades in October 2020 and January 2021 featured a possible new intercontinental ballistic missile (the *Hwasong-17*, a possible new submarine-launched ballistic missile (the *Pukkuksong*), and new ballistic missiles mounted on a five-axle transport-erector-launcher. Pyongyang is continuously upgrading its pre-emptive and retaliatory strike capabilities with new technologies, including the development of 'hypersonic gliding flight warheads' and tactical nuclear warheads, and experiments with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles.³¹ Such capabilities provide greater military options for a North Korean attack, reduce launch warning times and severely complicate missile defence reactions. Japan feels acutely threatened by those capabilities in the hands of a bellicose North Korean

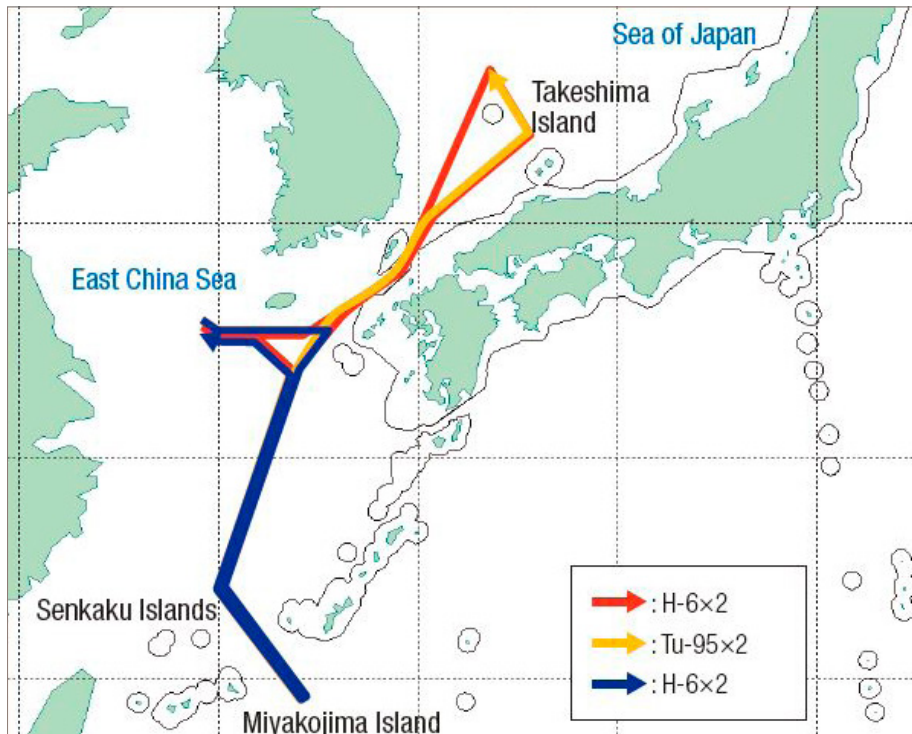
regime in a context of longstanding enmity and disputes over the abduction of Japanese citizens by the DPRK in the 1970s. Japan also fears intrusions into its sovereign space from ‘suspicious vessels’ (one such vessel was destroyed by the Japan Coast Guard in the 2001 Battle of Amami-Ōshima) and, potentially, by North Korea’s extensive special forces units. The DPRK also features heavily in Japan’s efforts to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, although at present the prospects for the peaceful denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula remain moribund.

Russia and Russo-Chinese strategic cooperation

The Russian Federation also potentially poses security risks to Japan, largely centred on the disputed issue of the Northern Territories (the Kuril Islands), which were seized by the Soviet Union from Japan in World War II. Japan is conscious of Russia’s military modernisation of its strategic nuclear forces, conventional capabilities and advanced technological research on hypersonic weapons, as well as intensified activities in the space and the electromagnetic spectrum domains. *The Defense of Japan 2021* notes that much of Moscow’s latest military equipment is deployed in the Russian Far East, including the disputed territories (where advanced missile systems have been installed). Russian military exercises have occurred in the Sea of Okhotsk, including the testing of new *Bulava* submarine-launched ballistic missiles in 2020. Russia also intermittently conducts strategic bomber patrols that circumnavigate the Japanese archipelago. At the time of writing, Russian military action against Ukraine provides a stark reminder of Russia’s military capabilities and willingness to employ them.

Additionally, the spectre of *joint Russo-Chinese strategic cooperation* was on conspicuous display at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, where presidents Putin and Xi lauded their ‘no limits’ partnership.³² Indeed, Russia and China have enjoyed a robust strategic partnership since 1996, which, despite substantial critique from (Western) analysts regarding its cohesion (as simply ‘a marriage of convenience’³³), has gone from strength to strength, and others argue that it’s on the ‘verge of an alliance’³⁴—an appraisal alluded to by President Vladimir Putin himself. Since the two countries have conducted several naval drills in waters proximate to Japan, Tokyo has learned to take Russo-Chinese cooperation seriously. In July 2019 and December 2020, Russian Tu-95 bombers joined Chinese H-6 bombers to conduct joint patrols across the East China Sea and Sea of Japan. Most recently, in October 2021, a substantial combined naval patrol passed through the Tsugaru Strait (between the main islands of Honshu and Hokkaido), indicating an uptick in *combined* maritime pressure on Japan (see Figure 3). Jay Maniyar assesses that ‘Russia–China military cooperation is believed to be aimed at weakening Japan’s security. As such, the brazen nature of Sino-Russian combined “air patrols” that violate Japanese airspace is a significant issue of concern’ for Tokyo.³⁵ Furthermore, according to an ASPI report, ‘China and Russia have not only expanded military cooperation but are also undertaking more extensive technological cooperation, including in fifth-generation telecommunications, AI, biotechnology and the digital economy.’³⁶ It’s to this issue that we now turn.

Figure 3: China-Russia joint flight (December 22, 2020)



Source: MOD, *Defence of Japan 2021*, page 20.

New technologies and domains

In addition to country-specific threat assessments, Japanese security strategy pays close attention to the changing modalities through which risks may emanate. Those include 'military science and technologies', 'the space domain', 'the electromagnetic spectrum' and 'the cyber domain'. All of the actors above are noted for their pursuit of advantage in these domains.

First, as I've alluded to, is the concern that potential adversaries eagerly seek to exploit game-changing ('fourth industrial revolution') technological advances by means of 'civil-military fusion' in fields such as AI and quantum computing, but especially in the development of weapons systems employing hypersonics and high-power energy weapons. Such emerging and disruptive technologies could swiftly redraw the lines of the regional balance of power.

Second, the space domain has gained greater prominence alongside traditional 'joint' (land-sea-air) operations. Satellites are a crucial component in ensuring the necessary reconnaissance and communication to achieve situational awareness in the 21st-century battlespace. China has increased its satellite launches, including for the *BeiDou* satellite navigation system, and has demonstrated antisatellite missiles, while Russia has also tested antisatellite systems.

Third, this development is closely accompanied by increased activities in the electromagnetic spectrum domain, ensuring that any conflict will be accompanied by sustained electronic warfare between opponents (drones are particularly vulnerable), as well as the exposure of information and communications technology systems to such attacks in peacetime.

Both the space and electromagnetic spectrum domains are also highly pertinent to grey-zone operations and 'hybrid warfare' challenges.

Last, the cyber domain has added a fifth dimension to contemporary warfare, as well as serving as a major tool of hybrid or grey-zone operations or other ‘disruptive’ actions.³⁷ With reference to PLA Unit 61398, Mark Manantan argues that ‘Japan’s crown jewels—defense technologies and industries, military contractors, and finance and high-technology sectors—have been the primary target of various state-sponsored hackers linked to China.’³⁸ The DPRK has also become adept in this form of ‘asymmetric warfare’, launching attacks on Japanese defence contractors. Russia has likewise demonstrated high-level capacity in this domain, including in operations against Estonia (2007) and Ukraine (2014 to the present), and engaged in cyberattacks on various organisations related to the 2021 Tokyo Olympic Games. This informs Japan’s own defence and military planning (as is outlined under ‘Internal mobilisation’ below).

Non-traditional security threats

Japanese policymakers recognise that sources of insecurity are not confined to powerful state actors; nor will they necessarily take a conventional military form. While the risk of a terrorist incident in Japan (such as the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas attack) remains low, environmental non-traditional security (NTS) threats have gained greater importance in Japan’s security strategy. On the global level, Japan recognises climate change as a ‘security issue’,³⁹ not only in terms of dangers to the global ecosphere, but because of its role in precipitating instability and local conflicts over land resources or sparking external migration (‘spillover’ effects). Furthermore, Japan itself is highly susceptible to natural disasters, such as the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake in Kobe, the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, Typhoon Wipha in 2013, the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake, and flash floods in 2018 (which may be related to climate change). The consequences of regional disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami or Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines in 2015 also have impacts upon Japan, including expectations of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR). Disaster preparedness and response must therefore assume a high priority as an NTS issue in Japanese security strategy. Interestingly, MOD/JSDF resources have been deployed to assist in disaster relief, emergency response and vaccination programs domestically, indicating the ‘fungibility’ of defence/military assets in countering NTS risks.⁴⁰ Although Japan no doubt considers other NTS threats, including transnational crime or human trafficking, those don’t feature conspicuously in its national security strategy, while earlier emphasis on ‘human security’, although featuring in the National Security Strategy, is no longer accorded notable priority in practice. Needless to say, infectious disease response has been accorded significant attention as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Part 2: Responses

Japan's vision for the regional security order: a free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)

Inhabiting such a threat-rich regional environment and faced with new vectors of insecurity, such as technology, space and cyber, Japan has sought to respond through a broad spectrum of measures. The National Security Strategy claims that 'surrounded by an increasingly severe security environment and confronted by complex and grave national security challenges, it has become indispensable for Japan to make more proactive efforts.'⁴¹ Such proactivity can be found in its unveiling of a 'grand design' for shaping the regional order, supported by more specific policies that flow from that diplomatic paradigm.

Japan's security strategy writ large is essentially intertwined with its diplomatic vision of a FOIP, officially unveiled in 2016 at the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) Summit in Nairobi. It contains clear security-related elements, as well as providing the 'vision' towards which its more specific security, defence and military policies are directed at achieving.⁴² The appearance of the FOIP policy in both the *2020 Diplomatic Bluebook* of Japan, published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and the placement of the policy at the very start of the *2021 Defense of Japan*, are testament to its centrality to any overall appraisal of national security strategy and to remarkable coordination between ministries.

Before examining the specific content of the FOIP policy, it's necessary to acknowledge the *importance that Japan places on the 'Indo-Pacific'* as a novel regional construct and the arena in which it will enact its policies.⁴³ Indeed, Japan was instrumental in developing the notion of the Indo-Pacific region, ever since former Prime Minister's Abe's pronouncements in 2007, when he spoke of a 'confluence of two seas'.⁴⁴ In the light of its relative decline in power resources since its economic heyday, it makes strategic sense for Japan to concentrate its focus on this vital region of interest, where Tokyo can exercise its full spectrum of capabilities to greatest effect.

The FOIP vision '*is rooted in the concept of ensuring the peace and prosperity of the entire Indo-Pacific region and consequently the world by realizing a free and open order based on the rule of law in the region*'.⁴⁵ What's notable about the FOIP policy is its representation of Japan's new efforts to shape the regional order as an 'architect' in its own right, rather than simply serving as a 'supporter' of the US-led liberal order. While its own vision of regional order distinctly chimes with the traditional mainstays of the American liberal order, it puts a distinctly Japanese imprimatur, including a 'leading' role for itself, on this project.⁴⁶ Importantly, Tamaki affirms, 'Japan has attempted to modify a part of the US-led liberal order, especially in the [Indo-Pacific] region, to suit its own interests and identity'.⁴⁷ A stress on ASEAN 'centrality' is apparent throughout, showing that the FOIP policy is aimed at connecting with the regional multilateral architecture.

Officially, the FOIP is based on three 'pillars':

1. Promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation and free trade
2. Pursuit of economic prosperity (improving connectivity and so on)
3. Commitment to peace and stability.⁴⁸

The expression of the pillars is rather formulaic, yet their amorphous presentation provides scope for flexible interpretation according to necessity, thus serving as an ‘*umbrella concept*’.⁴⁹ Based on a wider reading of national security strategy, several observations can be made about how the three pillars are operationalised in practice.

- Pillar 1 clearly relates to Japan’s desire to prioritise rule-governed interaction as the ordering principle for the Indo-Pacific, rather than a ‘might makes right’ approach. It signals a premium on international law, including the right to free transit, and seeks to ensure that trading relationships are not characterised by protectionism or the flagrant use of economic coercion.
- Pillar 2 pertains to advancing Japan’s economic interests, including providing competitive alternatives to China’s Belt and Road Initiative, through, for example, its Partnership for Quality Infrastructure program. It also embraces a commitment to the region’s economic architecture, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. (Note, however, that as economics is assuming a ‘security’ dimension all of its own, even this pillar becomes relevant to security strategy).
- Pillar 3 can essentially be seen as rather all-encompassing, but serves to outline the nation’s commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, abstention from the threat or use of military force (including by Japan), and condemnation of unilateral attempts to alter the *status quo* (in respect to territorial issues). The connections with the security challenges outlined above under ‘Japan’s threat assessment’ are clearly evident.

The FOIP policy therefore sets the stage upon which Japan’s security strategy unfolds and incorporates key roles for the MOD and JSDF. It does this by bridging the diplomatic sphere of Japanese foreign policy, headed by the MOFA, and the defence/military community, represented by the MOD and the JSDF, through the common denominator of ‘security’:

The MOD/JSDF will further contribute to the peace and stability of the region and the international community through active cooperation with countries that share Japan’s vision of the FOIP, including not only the United States as our ally, but also Australia, India, European countries including the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, as well as Canada and New Zealand.⁵⁰

The latter, collaborative aspect of Japan’s security strategy is treated in detail below in ‘External mobilisation’, but it’s important to register here how the FOIP is designed to superintend further efforts towards partnership building, and thus achieve synergistic effects in Japan’s national security strategy. As Hinata-Yamaguchi attests, ‘In essence, FOIP is a strategy that comprehensively and proactively deals with the security challenges in the areas vital to Japan’s security.’⁵¹

The MOD’s 2018 NDPGs are based on ‘*full coordination with its diplomatic policy*’.⁵² For that purpose, the MOD’s objectives are explicitly synchronised with pillars 1 and 3, while the MOFA, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and the Japan International Cooperation Agency chiefly cover the economic Pillar 2. (See ‘Conclusions’ below for comments on ‘economic security’.)

Defense of Japan outlines the remit of the MOD in supporting the FOIP objectives by:

- securing the stable use of major sea lanes by way of defence cooperation and exchange activities
- preventing contingencies through confidence building and mutual understanding
- contributing to peace and stability through active engagement in the region, in cooperation with partner countries.⁵³

Japan’s defence and military instruments are thus harnessed to the FOIP vision of regional order, as well as their obvious role in defending Japanese territory and contributing to the US alliance network.

Internal mobilisation: security and defence reform, military capabilities

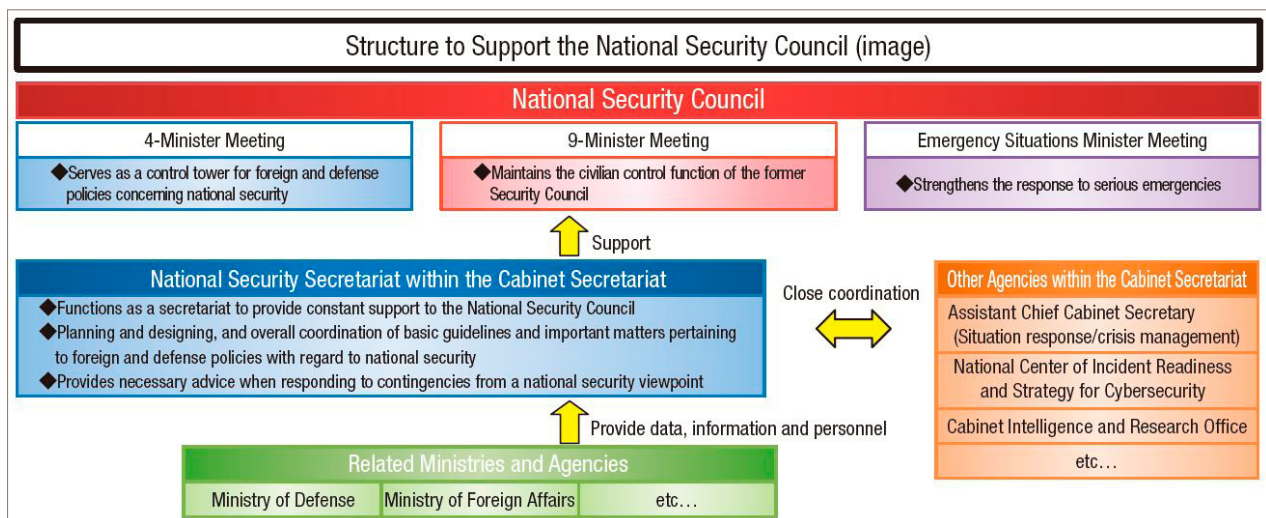
The essential purpose of Japan's security apparatus and defence establishment, including its military forces, is to provide for the protection of its national territorial sovereignty and guard it from attack. But, as demonstrated above, the FOIP standpoint views *regional* security contributions as another important function. In order to fulfil those roles more effectively, Japan has reformed its domestic security apparatus, recalibrated its defence architecture and enhanced its military capabilities. This is a three-track process, but each of the tracks leads in the direction of a coordinated effort to serve the objectives of the country's security strategy: the tracks are 'means to ends'.

Domestic security reform

It's useful to examine developments in the security/defence policymaking terrain domestically in Japan, as such laws and reformed institutions set the political context and provide oversight for national strategy.

*In internal debates and institutional developments, Japanese security thinking has undergone a 'renaissance' in recent years.*⁵⁴ We've seen significant departures from Japan's traditional low-profile stance on security and defence, beginning in the post-Cold War period, with the International Peace Cooperation Law (1992), Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law (2001) and Contingency Legislation (2003), culminating in the conversion of the Defense Agency into a fully-fledged Ministry of Defense in 2007. This naturally accorded the MOD new influence and greatly enhanced the status of defence bureaucrats. Galvanised by the broader national aspiration to make a 'proactive contribution to international peace', the 2013 establishment of a US-style National Security Council with a dedicated national security adviser (technically, the Director-General of the National Security Secretariat) is significant. The National Security Council was designed to act as a 'control tower' (*kanseitō*) for the management of security strategy and crisis response and further centralised decision-making in the Prime Minister's Office (*Kantei*) (see Figure 4). In the same year, Japan released its first ever National Security Strategy, providing a blueprint for its grand strategy. The 2014 State Secrets Law also sought to tighten government control of sensitive information, applying severe penalties for violations in a bid to reassure the US about earlier leaks.

Figure 4: Organisation of the National Security Council



Source: MOD, *Defence of Japan 2021*, page 220.

*This progressive security policy reform was crowned by the 2015 Peace and Security Legislation, which, according to Akimoto, was a ‘historic turning point in Japan’s security policy’.*⁵⁵ This complex package of legislation contained one new law—the International Peace Support Law—and amendments to 10 other pieces of legislation through the Peace and Security Legislation Development Law. The most significant aspects that interest us here are the new provision for ‘collective defence’ with allies and partners (only in situations threatening the survival of Japan) and the clarification of responses to ‘armed attack situations’ that provide the legal framework for conflict contingencies, such as the interception of hostile missiles. Although the laws were denounced domestically and overseas as ‘war legislation’, for security analysts they were highly significant improvements. The package of laws ‘fundamentally changed the institutional relationship between Japan’s military and a broad array of national bureaucracies and local governments’, according to one commentator.⁵⁶ This legislation, though incremental in parts, paves the way for enhancing national deterrence and US alliance cooperation and greater participation in peacekeeping operations (armed rescue operations are now permitted), and generally makes Japan’s overall defence posture more robust and responsive.⁵⁷ It’s no coincidence that the new laws were promulgated at the same time as a revision of the 2015 *Japan–US Defense Cooperation Guidelines*.

Limitations on security policy have also been loosened, including through new legislation on arms transfers and defence collaboration, such as the 2011 Standards for the Overseas Transfer of Defense Equipment, which facilitate capacity building. Although the Abe government sought to go further and revise the ‘no-war’ clause of Article IX of the Constitution, that has proven, and is likely to remain, politically impossible, so the Prime Minister has had to settle for incremental ‘reinterpretations’.

One of the objectives of this domestic security reform, emphasised throughout official documents, has been to create *more ‘seamless’ coordination between the political, security and defence apparatus of the state*. This mirrors and reinforces the synergistic approach to security strategy emphasised throughout. The NDPGs note the importance of Japan being able to ‘seamlessly conduct activities at all stages from peacetime to armed contingencies’.⁵⁸ As one commentator concludes: ‘These reforms in Japanese national security institutions, laws and policies will not necessarily lead to significant *quantitative* change in Japan’s national power, but will have significant *qualitative* impact in the future.’⁵⁹

The National Security Strategy operates on an approximately 10-year cycle and enunciates Japan’s diplomatic and defence policy objectives. From the strategy follow the NDPGs, which prescribe targets for the JSDF. The Medium Term Defense Program (MTDP) then checks actual expenditures at a five-year interval and the quality of major equipment procurements. The annual defence budget is reviewed against that assessment.

The fundamental objectives of Japan’s national defence policy are stated as follows:

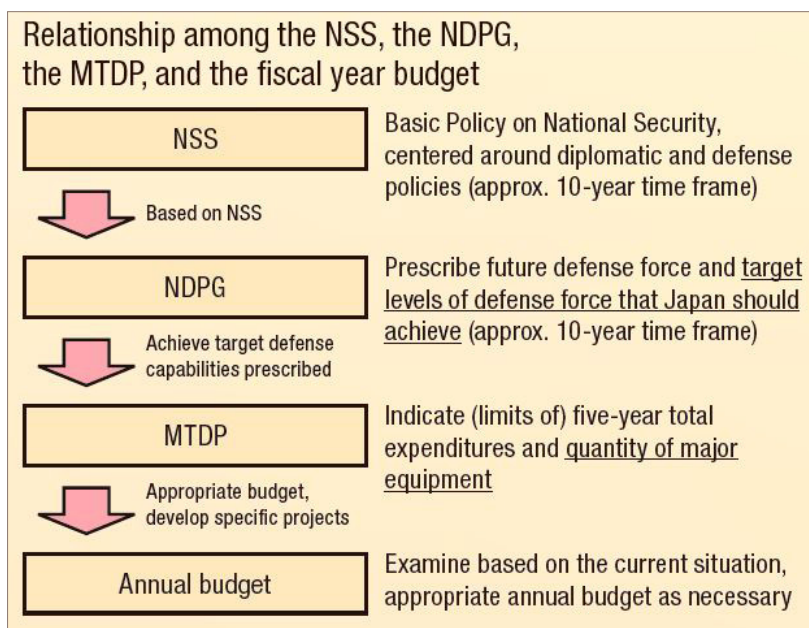
1. to create, on a steady-state basis, a security environment desirable for Japan by integrating and drawing on the strengths at the nation’s disposal
2. to deter threats from reaching Japan by making opponents realise that doing harm to Japan would be difficult and consequential
3. should a threat reach Japan, to squarely counter the threat and minimise damage.⁶⁰

The NDPGs seek to achieve those aims by ‘strengthening Japan’s own architecture for national defense’, including military capabilities, ‘the Japan–US Alliance’ and ‘international security cooperation’.

National 'defence architecture'

The National Security Strategy states that 'Japan will maintain and *improve a comprehensive architecture* for responding seamlessly to an array of situations, ranging from armed attacks to large-scale natural disasters.'⁶¹ The NDPGs and MTDP provide highly structured processes for doing so under MOD oversight (see Figure 5). The MOD now enjoys far greater prestige than the former Defense Agency and increasingly attracts the brightest personnel. The MOD and JSDF now have a far greater voice in national policymaking and bureaucratic weight. However, one of the key challenges for Japan is to create a more unified joint command in order to develop a multidomain defence force. At present, this involves the strengthening of the Joint Staff Office 'to further promote joint-ness of GSDF, MSDF and ASDF in all areas' and improve decision-making coordination and readiness in a more challenging defence environment.⁶² However, Hinata-Yamaguchi warns that 'Structurally, the JSDF still lacks a permanent joint command, leaving the Joint Staff Office over-burdened with handling both management and operational matters.'⁶³ Indeed, recommendations that the 2018 NDPGs specify the creation of a joint operational HQ were not pursued as an expert panel had suggested.

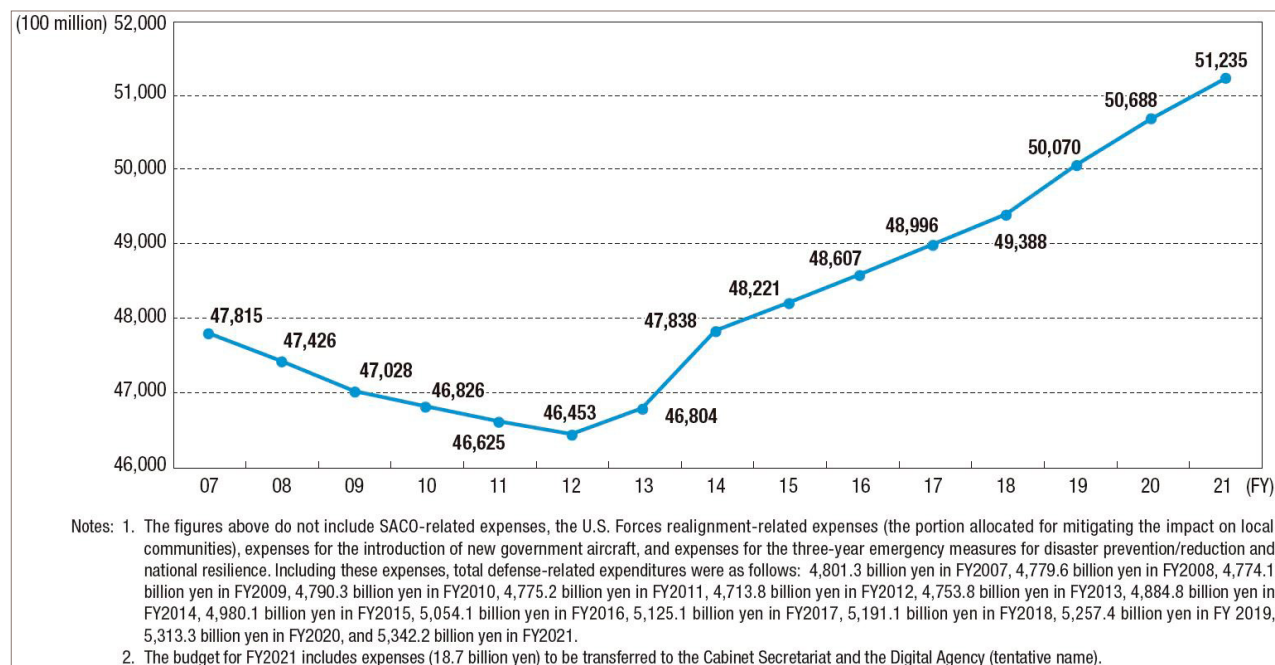
Figure 5: Relationship among the NSS, the NDPG, the MTDP, and the fiscal year budget



Source: MOD, *Defence of Japan 2021*, page 23.

Defence spending has grown gradually, from approximately ¥4.75 trillion (A\$57.6 billion) in 2013 to ¥5.4 trillion (A\$64.6 billion) for 2022 to facilitate new capability acquisitions (see Figure 6). However, the LDP has promised to double defence spending in a pledge to the lower house of the National Diet.⁶⁴ That pledge becomes more feasible in the political climate surrounding the Ukraine crisis, which has already resulted in announcements of major defence funding increases by certain NATO allies. In order to procure some of the capabilities planned for the JSDF, in addition to acquisitions from the US and other partners (including defence collaboration), Japan aims at maintaining and enhancing its indigenous defence production and technological bases (known as *kokusanka*). The desired defence force can't be supported without the necessary R&D, a domestic arms production base and capacities for the operation and servicing of equipment. With a finite budget and resource base, Japan aims at optimising and streamlining defence procurement, including by the incentivisation of international competitiveness (facilitated by reduced restrictions on arms exports and defence collaboration). Accordingly, 'MOD/JSDF will strengthen its project management throughout its equipment life-cycle, including during its research and development activities, and reduce the life-cycle costs to improve cost-effectiveness'.⁶⁵ However, that objective has featured in policy pronouncements since the 1990s but has yet to fully materialise.

Figure 6: Trend in Defense-related expenditures (initial budget) over the past 15 Years



Source: MOD, *Defence of Japan 2021*, page 231.

Technology plays an important role, and Japan seeks to exploit advantages gained through civil-military exchanges (spin-on/spin-off), including by leveraging its portfolios of relevant plans directed by the Council for Science, Technology and Innovation.⁶⁶ In addition to the various weapon systems and platforms outlined below, defence-scientific cooperation is geared towards achieving results in potential game-changing technologies such as AI, automated weapon systems and additive manufacturing (such as 3D printing). In the more mundane, but crucial, area of logistical support for the JSDF, the MOD seeks to introduce performance-based logistics in order to enhance 'sustainability and resiliency of defense capability including logistics support needs'.⁶⁷ Stockpiling fuel and spare parts, as well as dispersing and hardening support facilities in Japan and protecting assets, is a key aspect of this. Critics, such as Mulloy,⁶⁸ however, point out that serious deficiencies on these scores have been apparent since the Cold War and that little has changed since that time.

Defence capabilities: building a multidomain defence force

Although Japan is committed to an 'exclusively defense-oriented policy' (*senshūboei*), and notwithstanding ambiguous language in the Japanese Constitution apparently forbidding land, air and sea forces and 'war potential' (*senryoku*), the JSDF is a potent military force, albeit with some limitations. The 2018 MTDP guides Japan's defence procurement patterns and the realisation of the capabilities to achieve the objectives of the NDPGs, which are:

1. acquiring and strengthening capabilities essential for realising cross-domain operations
2. improving the efficiency of acquisition of equipment and reinforcing the technology base
3. reinforcing the human resource base [not considered here due to space limitations]
4. strengthening the Japan-US alliance and security cooperation
5. greater efficiency and streamlining in the build-up of defence capability.⁶⁹

The MTDP notes that 'In order to adapt to increasingly rapid changes in security environment, Japan will strengthen its defense capability at speeds that are fundamentally different from the past.'⁷⁰ Again, the MTDP signals Japan's commitment to effective coordination between the three branches of the JSDF, to achieve greater 'jointness'

and avoid 'stovepiping', further reinforcing the intent to ensure that the prosecution of national security strategy is 'seamless' and synergistic. The MTDP evinces clear intersections with the broader objectives of the FOIP, for example.

Updating the 'Dynamic Joint Defense Force' of 2010, the 2018 NDPGs indicate Japan's objective of building a 'Multi-Domain Defense Force' in response to the emerging importance of the space, electromagnetic and cyber domains. This stipulates the following requirements for the JSDF:

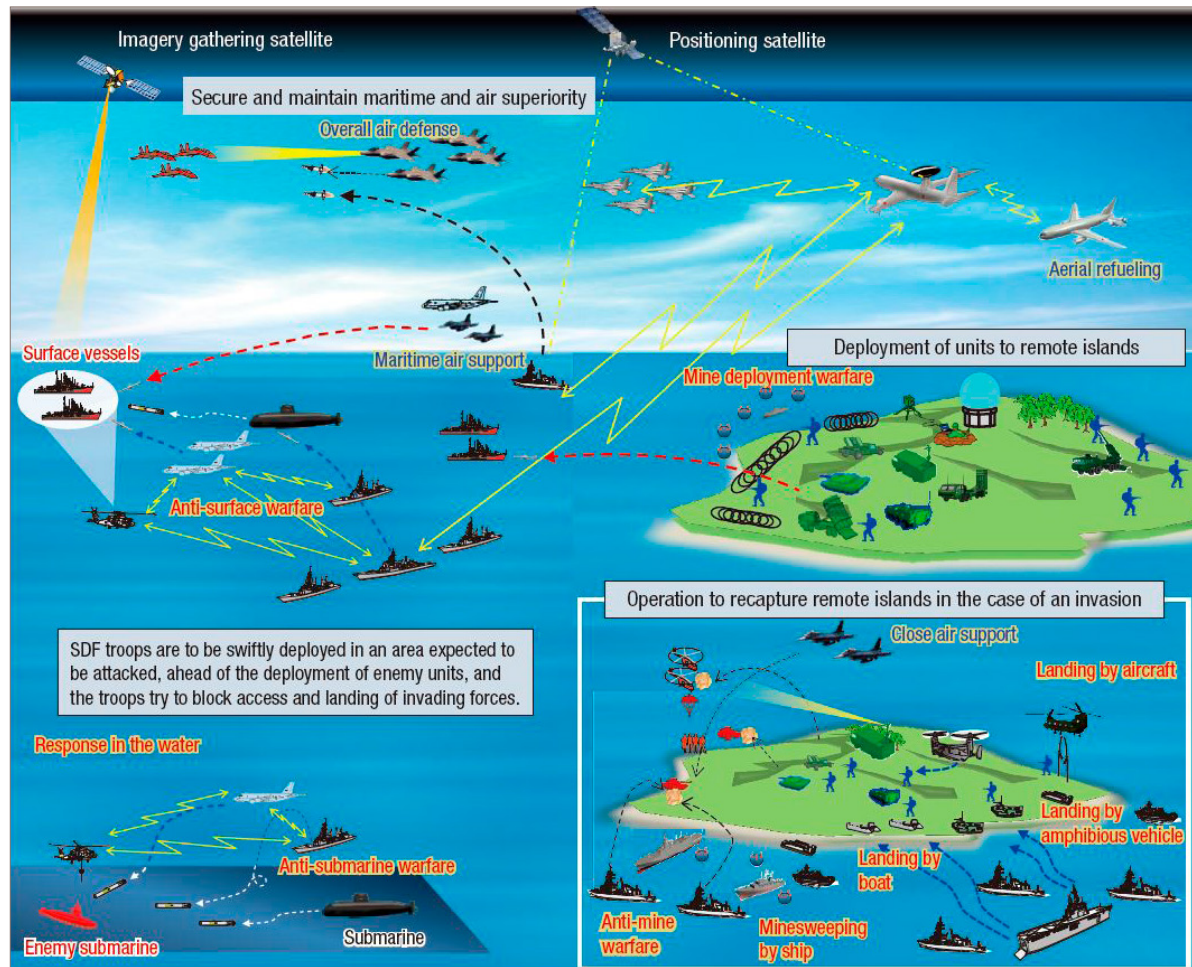
1. being able to execute cross-domain operations, which organically fuse capabilities in all domains, including space, cyberspace and electromagnetic spectrum to generate synergy and amplify the overall strength
2. being capable of sustained conduct of flexible and strategic activities during all phases from peacetime to armed contingencies
3. being capable of strengthening the ability of the Japan-US alliance to deter and counter threats as well as promoting multi-faceted and multi-layered security cooperation.⁷¹

This section gives a capsule review of some of the key developments towards that mandate and indicates how they're matched to the various threats faced by Japan. First, I briefly outline the traditional domains of land, sea and air, then the new domains of space, cyber and the electromagnetic spectrum, as well as improved intelligence capabilities. Note that some capabilities overlap between various branches of the JSDF, such as cyber and strike capabilities, which are woven in where appropriate. This is a natural function of 'jointness' and the blurring of domain boundaries in the conduct of modern warfare.

Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF): The JGSDF deploys 150,000 (nominally) active personnel under the centralised Ground Component Command, established in 2018. Historically, the JGSDF was concentrated in Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido, which was the perceived target of a Soviet attack during the Cold War, but which also provided ample space for facilities and training. But the JGSDF is now redeploying to the southernmost corner of Japan's home islands (*nansei shotō*) to deter and respond to new challenges in the East China Sea and Ryūkyū (including Okinawa) regions. JGSDF units, including stand-off missiles in the island of Anami-Ōshima, have been deployed to Yonaguni and Miyako islands. While the defence force is still charged with the overall defence of Japan, the emphasis has shifted to more mobile forces, including those assigned for rapid deployment (as formed under the Central Readiness Force established in 2007). JGSDF air mobility is enhanced by C-2 transport aircraft, CH-47JA helicopters and the deployment of the V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft.

Crucial to the prospective task of deterring or repelling attacks on remote island territories (see Figure 7), such as the Senkakus, is the new Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade, created in 2018 and based at Sasebo. This unit of 'marines' will be conveyed by JMSDF landing craft with proposed carrier air cover. Deterrence and response are further strengthened through the co-deployment of stand-off capabilities. JGSDF surface-to-ship missiles have also been deployed to the island of Anami-Ōshima to cover the southern island chain. Type-12 surface-to-ship missiles are having their range extended from 200 to 1,500 kilometres, and a new missile with a 2,000-kilometre range (estimates vary) is under development. Additionally, Japan is exploring the acquisition of a 'hypersonic gliding vehicle' and has already established two battalions equipped with drones to counter hypersonic missile attacks.

Figure 7: Conceptual Image of defending Japan's remote islands



Source: MOD, *Defence of Japan 2021*, page 262.

Indeed, the *question of strike capability acquisition* has featured prominently in policy plans to improve ‘deterrence’. On 27 November 2022, at JGSDF base camp Asaka, Prime Minister Kishida announced that ‘To strengthen defense capacity, we will not rule out options such as having enemy base strike capabilities.’⁷² Subsequent to Kishida’s speech, *Nikkei Asia* reported that former Foreign/Defense Minister Tarō Kōno had summed up the rationale as follows:

Japan needs four capacities: to strike enemy bases with ballistic and cruise missiles in order to take out aircraft and guided missile launch sites, among others; to conduct intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations; to establish air superiority; and to assess the effectiveness of strikes.⁷³

The acquisition of an indigenous strike capability, distinct from relying entirely on the US, has been fiercely debated in Japan, as constitutional issues have arisen over the question of ‘pre-emptive’ strikes on enemy launch-sites. The terms ‘self-defense counterattack capability’ or ‘enemy base counterattack capability’ are employed to assuage fears domestically and abroad as to Japanese intent.⁷⁴ The 2015 Peace and Security Legislation clarified Japan’s position to some degree in ‘situations that threaten the survival of Japan’.⁷⁵ Technically, according to Akimoto, Japan can strike in self-defence, but not launch a pre-emptive strike prior to being attacked.⁷⁶ This means that it must attempt to shoot down a missile headed for Japan in the boost-phase—a complex operation.

Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF): The JMSDF, which is recognised as one of the world's most powerful navies, currently consists of 154 ships and 346 aircraft and deploys approximately 45,800 personnel. Because Japan is an archipelagic country with about 7,000 islands and is a self-identified 'maritime nation', naval defence is crucial to its security and also serves for sea lane protection and diplomatic activities (such as port calls and patrols). The JMSDF is known for its impressive submarine and antisubmarine warfare and minesweeping capabilities.⁷⁷ With a focus on threats in the maritime domain, Japan is slightly increasing its submarine force from 18 to 22 boats, including by introducing the *Taigei*-class lithium-ion powered boat. The JMSDF has also begun to improve its expeditionary role through the deployment of small 'helicopter carriers' (*Hyūga* class) and 'larger helicopter carriers' of the *Izumo* class, which are slated for retrofitting to carry the F-35B short take-off and vertical landing Joint Strike Fighter (of which 42 are on order). The latter is designed to help protect remote island territories such as the Senkakus in cooperation with the JGSDF's Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade. The JMSDF's two *Atago*-class and four *Kongō*-class air-defence destroyers equipped with the Aegis system (currently being upgraded) are to provide missile defence in support of tactical operations or isolated ballistic missile attack. A new class of destroyers is also being deployed (the *Maya* class, also with Aegis and surface-to-ship missiles), as well as a new class of stealth frigate (the *Mogami* class). These efforts are aimed at achieving local maritime superiority in a conflict scenario.

In both peacetime and war, the JMSDF places a premium on maritime domain awareness and stresses the need for 'persistent ISR' (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance). New OZZ-5 unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs) will assist in that task. All of these developments point to the crucial tasks of defending Japan's maritime sovereignty and integrity and responding to Chinese Coast Guard and 'maritime militia' efforts to compromise them (backed, over the horizon, by the PLA Navy) and covering amphibious operations by the JGSDF in the event that Japan has to repel a landing or retake its island territories. The Japan Coast Guard, with 14,000 personnel, 66 patrol craft and 85 aircraft, it should be noted, is often on the front line of responding to grey-zone encroachments upon Japanese maritime territory, although it's a law enforcement capability, rather than a defence one. It has also been significantly upgraded.⁷⁸ Closing the jurisdictional and legal 'gaps' between the JMSDF and the Japan Coast Guard is a key aspect in responding to grey-zone challenges.

Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF): The JASDF consists of 50,000 personnel and deploys 740 aircraft, of which 330 are fighters. Its key missions are to maintain air superiority, air transport and ISR and to take complementing actions in the land and maritime domains. Again, the emphasis is on the 'southern flank'. An additional squadron of F-15s has already redeployed to Naha, Okinawa, to augment its air defence, and plans to deploy F-35s on Miyazaki Island are also in train. In order to achieve local air superiority, Japan will deploy 63 F-35A conventional take-off and landing aircraft, as replacements for the F-4s, and upgrade its F-2 fleet. Japan also seeks to develop a next-generation fighter (most probably in cooperation with Lockheed Martin). In all cases, the most modern and effective electronic warfare systems are sought, and new air-to-air missiles will be carried (including a joint-venture adaptation of the European Meteor: the Mitsubishi AAM-4). The ambition to develop an effective strike capability is again notable. In 2017, procurements of the Joint Air-to-Surface Missile, the Long-Range Anti-Ship Missile and the Joint Strike Missile to equip the F-35s were announced (although this requirement is currently being reviewed).

Again, a strong accent is placed upon 'persistent ISR'. Japan is establishing an airborne early warning wing. Assets include fixed-wing patrol aircraft (P-3C Orion, E-2C/D Hawkeye), the Boeing E-767 (as an airborne warning and control system) and patrol helicopters (SH-60J and SH-60K), and upgrades are planned for fixed-wing patrol aircraft (P-1). ISR will be further enhanced by the creation of a squadron of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), plus the procurement of a long-endurance UAV (Global Hawk) (see Figure 8).

Finally, air defence against missile attack (in combination with the JGSDF and JMSDF) is also a major priority for the JASDF. The JASDF operates an integrated ballistic missile defence system to shoot down incoming missiles at different stages of their trajectory. The main assets are Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3 and PAC-3 MSE) missiles, alongside the Aegis-equipped JMSDF destroyers. This relies upon the Japan Aerospace Defense Ground Environment, which is an automatic warning and control system using an array of radars across Japan, but will

now be enhanced by improved satellite capability. Contrary to misperceptions, the ballistic missile defence mission command has authority to shoot down, for example, North Korean missiles headed for *Japanese* terrestrial targets. In 2020, Japan cancelled its plans for Aegis-Ashore air defence systems, after a great deal of ministerial controversy, in favour of equipping two additional destroyers of the JMSDF with Aegis.

Figure 8: Conceptual image of monitoring and surveillance of the waters and airspace surrounding Japan



Source: MOD, *Defence of Japan 2021*, page 249.

Space: In support of capabilities in traditional domains, Japan seeks to exploit advantages and synergies through improvements in its space capabilities, foreshadowing a transition towards an ‘aero-space force’ in future. In line with the 2008 Basic Space Law, Japan is committed to ‘peaceful uses of outer space’ as per the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. The treaty doesn’t preclude the greater use of space for civilian purposes, and the boundaries between civil and military applications are inherently blurred. To enhance information-gathering, communication and positioning capabilities in order to attain space superiority in a variety of contingencies, Japan established the JASDF Space Operation Squadron in 2020 and a space situational awareness system. This is an evolution of the JASDF towards a ‘Air and Space Self-Defense Force’.

Again, this is about optimising situational awareness through augmented command, control, communications, computing and intelligence (C4I) capabilities to underwrite ‘traditional’ operations. Newly developed technologies will include a sophisticated X-band satellite communications system, space-based optical telescopes, and space situational awareness laser ranging devices. In order to provide necessary redundancy in receiving positioning signals beyond GPS, Japan will use the ‘*Michibiki*’ Quasi-Zenith Satellite System, information-gathering satellites and commercial satellites, including microsatellites. Operational responsibility will reside with different branches of the

JSDF in coordination with the Japan Space Aerospace Exploration Agency, which is responsible for satellite launches from Tanegashima island (in the *Nansei-shotō*). These developments demonstrate Japan's aspiration to become a *bona fide* 'space power'.

Cybertechnology: Among the 'new' domains, cyberspace has assumed far greater salience in response to the challenges in that domain in both peacetime (grey-zone) and conflict (hybrid warfare / wartime) contexts. In 2014, the government enacted the Basic Act on Cyber Security and, in 2015, produced a whole-of-government Cyber Security Strategy (which was updated in 2020). The NDPGs declare that Japan will 'fundamentally strengthen its cyber defense capability, including capability to disrupt, during attack against Japan, opponent's use of cyberspace for the attack'.⁷⁹ Japan engages in continuous testing of its cyber defences as part of its efforts to enhance the resiliency of its C4I systems, which are vital to operations in the traditional domain. Responsibility is devolved to various branches of the JSDF. New developments, integrated into a whole-of-government approach, have included expanding the Cyber Defense Squadron (from 200 to 1,000 personnel by 2023) and other units. In 2008, the JSDF established a joint Command Control Communications Computers System Command, which will be superseded by a Cyber Space Command and Cyber Defense Group, which will be a joint unit. Each of the traditional services also has its own cyber arm: the System Protection Unit (JGSDF), the Communication Security Group (JMSDF), and the Computer Security Evaluation Squadron (JASDF) tasked with defence and countermeasures.⁸⁰ These are substantive improvements, bringing Japan closer to the world's top cyber powers, according to the *National Cyber Power Index 2020*.⁸¹

Electromagnetic spectrum: Akimoto argues that 'The electromagnetic spectrum has become one of the most critical domains for Japan's defense'.⁸² The NDPGs identify this as a 'major operational domain situated on the frontline of offense-defense dynamic in today's warfare'. The guidelines add that 'Ensuring superiority in electromagnetic domain is also critical to realizing cross-domain operations'.⁸³ To that end, 'MOD/SDF will newly establish specialized sections in the internal bureau and the Joint Staff respectively in order to enhance the function to make policies pertaining to effective and efficient use of electromagnetic spectrum in MOD/JSDF'.⁸⁴ Thus, Japan is upgrading the electronic warfare capabilities of its existing F-15 fighters and utility aircraft (EP-3 and UP-3D) and is introducing the F-35 fully equipped with network electronic warfare devices. In order to counter an opponent's electronic jamming (of radars and drones) and jam those of the opponent's communications links, Japan aims for the capability to disrupt the C4I of assailants through the electromagnetic domain. This necessitates the procurement of 'standoff electronic warfare aircraft, high-output electronic warfare equipment, high-output microwave equipment and electromagnetic pulse (EMP) ammunition'.⁸⁵ The JGSDF Signal School deployed a vehicle-mounted network electronic warfare system in 2020, adding to this expansion of capabilities.

Intelligence: The initiatives outlined above are closely linked to Japan's increased efforts to improve its intelligence capabilities.⁸⁶ The MTDP indicates that the 'MOD/SDF will drastically strengthen information-gathering and analysis capabilities so that MOD/SDF will be fully capable of meeting various intelligence requirements including those related to new domains'.⁸⁷ To strengthen the intelligence-gathering and -processing capabilities of the multidomain defence force, the JSDF aims at procuring radio-wave information-gathering aircraft and ground-based signals intelligence sensors, while upgrading 'the Japan Aerospace Defense Ground Environment (JADGE) system, the connection of each JSDF service's systems including the Defense Information Infrastructure and the improvement of each JSDF service's data links'.⁸⁸ Beyond that, to support its national security decision-making, under the oversight of a range of civilian agencies and ministries, but in coordination with the JSDF:

Japan will fundamentally strengthen its information-collecting capabilities from a diverse range of sources, including human intelligence, open source intelligence, signals intelligence, and imagery intelligence. In addition, Japan will promote the utilization of geospatial intelligence with which various types of intelligence are combined.⁸⁹

Although that appears to be an impressive ambition, some commentators are sceptical about what's been achieved to date and ponder Japan's relative deficiencies, such as its lack of a centralised intelligence agency that could, for example, productively engage with the Five Eyes nations—another of Tokyo's future aspirations.⁹⁰

External mobilisation: strengthening alliances and partnerships

The Japan–US alliance

The significant improvements in Japan's national security, strategic posture and military–defence capabilities are not only motivated by aspirations to achieve more self-reliance, but are intended to facilitate greater contributions ('burden-sharing') to the US alliance, as well as to other external partnerships. Hinata-Yamaguchi argues that 'The developments in Japan's defense readiness have certainly benefitted the Japan–US alliance and other partnerships, with changes in US perceptions of the alliance and of Japan's role.'⁹¹

As is evident from its prominent appearance in the documents cited throughout this report, the *Japan–US alliance remains 'the cornerstone of peace, security, and prosperity in the region'* in Japanese official thinking.⁹² Since its inception in 1951, and revision in 1960, the alliance has functioned as a crucial prop of Japanese security strategy, and that shows no sign of changing, despite ancillary internal and external efforts to improve Japan's overall security posture. The US Forces Japan comprise approximately 55,000 troops forward-deployed in a range of locations in Japan, but particularly concentrated in Okinawa (which has become the focal point of Japanese defence). The forces greatly augment Japanese defence, and the US additionally conducts space, cyber and intelligence activities from its perch in Japan. Tokyo views alliance cooperation as crucial to meeting the challenges outlined above in 'Japan's threat assessment' and is committed to 'bolstering the ability of the Alliance to deter and counter threats; enhancing and expanding cooperation in a wide range of areas; and steadily implementing measures concerning the stationing of US Forces in Japan'.⁹³ The Japan–US Security Treaty provides a guarantee for Japan's territorial defence (including the Senkaku Islands), including the crucial 'extended deterrence' provided by US nuclear weapons.

In 2015, the *Guidelines for Japan–US Defense Cooperation* were issued to *improve coordination against the range of regional challenges that the two countries jointly face and explore how to strengthen practical cooperation*. The guidelines 'provide the general framework and policy direction for the roles and missions of Japan and the United States, as well as ways of cooperation and coordination, with a view to improving the effectiveness of bilateral security and defense cooperation'.⁹⁴

They provide the following remit for bilateral cooperation:

1. seamless, robust, flexible, and effective bilateral responses
2. synergy across the two governments' national security policies
3. a whole-of-government alliance approach
4. cooperation with regional and other partners, as well as international organisations
5. the global nature of the Japan–US alliance.⁹⁵

The NDPGs indicate how 'Japan will expand and deepen cooperation in: space and cyber domains; comprehensive air and missile defense; bilateral training and exercises; bilateral ISR operations; and bilateral flexible deterrent options'.⁹⁶

This demonstrates the synergy between Japan's own efforts and its alliance policy. *Jointness and readiness are the key challenges for an effective alliance*. The 2015 Peace and Security Legislation crucially authorises the JSDF to engage in 'collective defence', allowing Japan to protect US assets in a conflict scenario (provided that pertains to the defence of Japan). The 2015 guidelines also created provision for an alliance coordination mechanism to better configure joint responses to regional conflicts at the command level, building upon the existing force-to-force interoperability built up over preceding years (which is strongest between the US Navy and the JMSDF). The mechanism 'can be used in peacetime, for large-scale disasters in Japan, and for regional and global cooperation.

It also enables whole-of-government coordination including all relevant US and Japanese agencies.⁹⁷ This is by some measure a recognition that much remains to be done in terms of a cohesive joint strategy between the JSDF and US Forces Japan. In support of practical military cooperation, and in line with Japan's objectives stated above, the allies are exploring further collaboration in defence R&D and the joint development of platforms, such as a new littoral combat ship (under the provision for 'defence equipment and technology cooperation').⁹⁸ Whether these expansive initiatives will bear fruit remains to be seen. Although lingering doubts about American 'abandonment' remain and may be behind Japan's efforts to develop its indigenous strike capability as insurance against such a possibility, both allies appear as committed as ever to their combined effort, but with Japan now assuming a more conspicuous military role. Nevertheless, there's no consideration of separating from the US alliance with a fully 'autonomous' defence capability.

New minilaterals and strategic partners

Closely related to this are Japan's efforts in the realm of 'international cooperation' to create cohesive and effective 'minilaterals' around the US alliance through common adherence to the 'Indo-Pacific' concept and subscription to the FOIP policy. Indeed, minilateral and trilateral relationships appear to have gained greater salience in Japanese security strategy, overshadowing earlier emphases on (security-related) multilateral regional forums, although those forums still have an important function.

The most longstanding of those arrangements is the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD), which brings together Japan, the US and Australia. As an extension of the TSD, the Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue or 'Quad', with the addition of India, has attracted the most scrutiny. Space precludes an examination of less significant forums, such as the Japan–India–Australia trilateral meetings.

The TSD was initiated in 2002 to coordinate security and defence policy between Tokyo, Washington and Canberra.⁹⁹ The 2007 promulgation of the Japan–Australia Special Strategic Partnership further reinforced this trilateral by connecting heretofore common US allies into a united front based on shared interests and values. Among the activities and objectives publicly advertised, the TSD emphasises a joint commitment to the FOIP and the rules-based order, especially in the maritime sphere. It highlights joint concerns over the South China Sea and East China Sea, as well as the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, thus addressing all of Japan's key security priorities. It has met at the ministerial level since 2006. Its most recent joint media release in 2019 indicated a respect for ASEAN 'centrality' and added a number of points relating to broader regional security issues, such as economic coercion, economic connectivity, human rights, capacity building and national resilience, to the agenda.¹⁰⁰

The Quad, appearing for the first time in 2007, brought in New Delhi as a fourth party. Japanese leadership played a significant role in preparing the ground for the Quad, which was foreshadowed by former Foreign Minister Asō's 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity' and Prime Minister Abe's 'Democratic Security Diamond' pronouncements. Although the grouping went into abeyance for a decade, it was resuscitated in 2017 as 'Quad 2.0' and now commands significant attention.¹⁰¹ There is much misperception about what the Quad represents, and it frequently attracts the misnomer of an 'alliance'. Technically, it can't qualify as such, given the absence of a quadrilateral treaty commitment to common defence. Instead, it's better thought of as a quadrilateral 'network' of strategic partnerships, since all of the constituent members have official strategic partnerships with one another.¹⁰² The Quad is a grouping of like-minded democracies with a convergence of shared interests and values. For Tokyo, as much as for Canberra and Washington, it has the benefit of drawing India, by means of the Indo-Pacific concept and the FOIP policy, into a common front in resisting challenges to the rules-based order. Not only does India provide additional counterweight to China in East Asia in strategic terms, but the Quad oversees tangible maritime cooperation on maritime domain awareness, freedom of the seas and joint naval exercises, such as Exercise Malabar, as well as addressing HADR responses.

Outside of US-centred minilaterals such as the TSD and Quad, a major development in Japanese security strategy has been the expansion of Japan's security horizons to seek out *new bilateral 'strategic partners'*.¹⁰³ Space precludes a full overview and appraisal of those multifarious partnerships, but among the most prominent are those with Australia (discussed in detail in next section), India, and several Southeast Asian countries (including Vietnam, the Philippines and Singapore), as well as select European states, such as France and the UK. Additionally, Japan has forged a strategic partnership with the EU since 2018.

Each of the partnerships is different due to circumstances, and some are far more developed than others, but a loose 'model' of their common content has emerged. Essentially, the strategic partnerships are augmented bilateral cooperation extending across the diplomatic, security, defence and economic spheres. In most cases, the relationships are institutionalised by annual leaders' summits and foreign and defence ministers' meetings, joint declarations and economic partnership agreements and are substantiated by a range of capacity-building work, joint training/exercises and other confidence-building measures.¹⁰⁴ In several cases, adhesion to the FOIP policy, in part or whole, diplomatically frames the partnerships. Essentially, they're a method for Japan to diversify from exclusive reliance upon the US to support its security strategy, although they complement but don't supersede that crucial relationship.¹⁰⁵

The Japan–Australia Special Strategic Partnership

The Japan–Australia Special Strategic Partnership is now an integral feature in Japan's security strategy, being the most prolific and successful of the new security bilaterals. It now plays an equally important part in Australian foreign and security policy, outside of, and in tandem with, the US alliance (and through the TSD). Japan is especially gratified to find a willing and capable partner in Australia, with which it can engage in practical cooperation with concrete outcomes, in contrast to the region's profusion of multilateral 'talk shops'.

Throughout the Cold War, Japan and Australia were cordial but distant partners, enjoying a strong trading relationship and indirectly aligned through their joint alliance treaties with their common US ally.¹⁰⁶ That started to change gradually in the post-Cold War period and then began to accelerate in the mid-2000s.¹⁰⁷ The watershed for the initiation of closer security cooperation was the *2007 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, which recognised that the security future of Japan and Australia was linked*. The declaration committed both countries to 'working together, and with others, to respond to new security challenges and threats, as they arise' and to 'increasing practical cooperation between the defence forces and other security related agencies of Japan and Australia'.¹⁰⁸ Following from that, the partners have successively forged ever-stronger ties extending across a number of spheres and consistently augmented the institutional structure of the partnership based upon shared values and interests, fulfilling their 2007 desire to 'create a comprehensive framework for the enhancement of security cooperation between Japan and Australia'.¹⁰⁹

The *Partnership Agenda Between Australia and Japan* now spells out its remit and activities (superseding the earlier 2009 Action Plan and 2012 Common Vision and Objectives Statement).¹¹⁰ The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade describes it as 'a fully rounded and diverse partnership including important political and security objectives'.¹¹¹

In this section, I concentrate on the ways in which the strategic partnership intersects with Japan's overall security strategy while also indicating the ways in which this serves Australia's own security strategy. As I've noted, the partnership is now highly substantive, but the following discussion highlights the diplomacy/security, defence and military aspects of cooperation. The MOD signals that 'Japan's relationship with Australia is becoming more important than ever before'.¹¹² The 'Conclusions' section indicates potential new directions for the existing partnership.

Figure 9: Royal Australian air force aviator and a United States airman prepare to refuel a Japan Air Self-Defense Force (Koku-Jieitai) F-15J Eagle aircraft at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam.



Source: Defence image library, [online](#).

First, the strategic partnership serves as a *common diplomatic platform to present joint statements, policies and initiatives*. As such, it has arguably assumed an important niche in the region's 'complex patchwork' of security architecture.¹¹³ There are multiple interlocking strands to the expression of joint objectives in the region. The jettisoning of the earlier 'Asia-Pacific' descriptor by both parties in 2017 and their mutual adoption and championing of the 'Indo-Pacific' geo-construct serves as a shared strategic prism through which Tokyo and Canberra view regional dynamics. It also facilitates connections with the US Indo-Pacific Strategy and instruments such as the Quad. The *de facto* adhesion of Australia to Japan's FOIP policy (complemented by the US version) is also mutually reinforcing and provides scope for joint cooperation towards its stated objectives. Consequently, the strategic partners jointly declare their 'shared strategic interests in the security, stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region'.¹¹⁴

Chief among those priorities for both parties is the *safeguarding of the 'rules-based order'*. The 'mission statement' of the strategic partnership has been recast to express their joint 'determination to deepen cooperation to promote a free, open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific region'.¹¹⁵ Neither Japan nor Australia can survive and prosper in an environment governed purely by power politics ('might is right'), and they therefore seek to jointly socialise the region into rules-governed interaction in respect of principles such as free trade, freedom of navigation, the rule of law, the peaceful resolution of disputes and refraining from coercive activities aimed at altering the *status quo*. On the last of those principles, both countries repeatedly affirm their opposition to such activities in the South China Sea and East China Sea through joint prime ministerial statements. Likewise, both countries have a joint position and track record in their opposition to nuclear proliferation through the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative and jointly condemn North Korean activities (including sanctions and counterproliferation efforts such as the Proliferation Security Initiative led by the US).

Second, as mutual confidence and trust between Tokyo and Canberra have increased, the countries have gradually built up ever-closer and more sensitive defence and military relationships—what Ishihara has dubbed a ‘second evolution’ in the partnership.¹¹⁶ They have worked assiduously to increase joint interoperability for the potential conduct of coalition operations. That effort began with the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement of 2010 (upgraded in 2017) and led to the signing into force of the Reciprocal Access Agreement in 2022, which will provide the legal structure for the stationing of troops in one another’s countries.¹¹⁷ They have engaged in a range of bilateral military training exercises, such as the JMSDF–RAN *Nichi-Gō* Trident and JASDF–RAAF *Bushidō*-Guardian drills, which aim at testing combined capabilities, including domain superiority, situational awareness and countering threats, all of which are relevant to security challenges, especially maritime security challenges. Those exercises continue to build upon co-deployments during peacekeeping operations in Cambodia (1993), South Sudan (2011) and Iraq (2005–06). In line with Japan’s bid to increase its international defence collaboration (tallying with similar Australian aspirations), the Agreement Concerning the Transfer of Defence Equipment was announced in 2014 to facilitate such cooperation. In 2016, Japanese hopes of supplying Australia’s future submarine needs were dashed by Canberra’s selection of a French design (which has now been discarded in favour of US/UK providers via AUKUS). That disappointment necessitated some rebuilding of diplomatic cordiality on Australia’s part, but was soon overcome.

In terms of *intelligence sharing*, Japan and Australia signed an information security agreement in 2012, and there are plans in train to upgrade it. With the introduction of the Special State Secrets Law in 2014, Tokyo hopes this will pave the way for enhanced intelligence cooperation, and perhaps ultimately admission into the Five Eyes arrangement, to which Australia is party alongside the US, Canada, the UK and New Zealand. Although it isn’t much advertised, for obvious reasons, the Australian Secret Intelligence Service has been training Japanese personnel in various government and military branches since 2008 in order to improve Japan’s intelligence capacity.

On a different plane, the strategic partnership also brings Japan together with Australia to *confront various NTS challenges*. Principal among those efforts are highly developed cooperation and training to respond to HADR contingencies. One example of this was Australia’s support for Japan’s HADR response to the 3.11 disaster under Operation Pacific Assist, which was reciprocated by Japan during the 2019–20 Australian bushfires emergency. Japan is especially vulnerable to natural disasters, as is Australia, but such incidents also occur recurrently across the Indo-Pacific region. In 2020, in regard to pandemics, ‘The Leaders decided to coordinate efforts to mitigate the health, social and economic impacts of COVID-19, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, and to accelerate the development and equitable access to diagnostics, therapeutics and safe, effective and affordable vaccines for COVID-19.’¹¹⁸ The partners have expressed their joint intent to seek the reform of the World Health Organization. Although the danger of international terrorism may have receded, Japan is prepared to coordinate with Australia through the 2003 Australia–Japan Joint Statement on Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism.¹¹⁹

One area in which the strategic partners have been highly active is their support for regional security (in line with the FOIP policy) by providing strategically targeted *official development assistance* and capacity building to smaller states. Both countries have independently provided hardware such as patrol boats to states facing incursions into their sovereign waters, along with other technologies and training to improve their maritime domain awareness. They have both increasingly focused on the South Pacific, where island states face a range of security challenges not only to their sovereignty or maritime resources but to their resiliency to natural disasters and climate change. The 2016 Strategy for Cooperation in the Pacific, which involves the promotion of ‘effective governance, economic growth and sustainable development, security and defence cooperation, and diplomatic initiatives’ sketches out a joint approach that fits well with Canberra’s ‘Pacific Step-up’.¹²⁰ In order to stave off the dangers of ‘debt-trap diplomacy’ and adversaries’ control of digital ecosystems in the South Pacific, both countries have separately and trilaterally (with the US) allocated funds and engaged in infrastructure provision to assist Pacific island countries.

Although the Japan–Australia Special Strategic Partnership creates bilateral capabilities, it’s important to note *how it relates to the broader security environment*. For example, the partnership also works to support the US alliance system. By ‘connecting the spokes’ of Japan and Australia closer together, it triangulates Japan–Australia–

US cooperation to create greater unity (as seen through the TSD). This also assists in US aspirations to create a 'networked security architecture' to knit together regional allies and partners into a common front to respond to challenges.¹²¹ Not only is the strategic partnership representative of such efforts, but it also serves independently as a potential (separate) 'nucleus' for building other coalitions, such as Japan–Australia–India, or other secondary power 'concerts'.¹²² Japanese diplomats have also welcomed the new AUKUS arrangement, which reinforces American commitment to the region, alongside Japan's strategic partners, Australia and the UK.¹²³

On an alternate path, the strategic partnership also seeks *compatibility with ASEAN-led regional institutional architecture*. The partners have jointly expressed their support for 'ASEAN centrality' (particularly the East Asia Summit) and looked for ways to connect the FOIP policy to ASEAN activities, including the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. A modest acknowledgement of this came with the 2019 *ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific*.¹²⁴ Though it's beyond the scope of this report, Japan and Australia have been highly active in developing and supporting the wider institutional architecture in the region (the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation forum and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement towards Trans-Pacific Partnership), and globally.

It's important to note that, while both Japan and Australia see value in ASEAN-led multilateral dialogue forums, they don't rely upon them principally to address the partners' national security interests. Instead, they rely on their own hard power, their US alliances, and other practical mechanisms for cooperation, such as minilaterals and the partnership itself.

Conclusions: Implications for Australia

A more proactive and capable Japan

The former Abe administration was critical in recalibrating Japan's security posture and returning it to regional leadership.¹²⁵ The groundbreaking FOIP policy was an unprecedented statement of the country's 'vision' for a rules-based order, and it closely comports with Australia's own regional objectives. The congruence of the two nations' regional policy is striking, and bilateral solidarity is powerfully expressed through the Japan–Australia Special Strategic Partnership.

Japan has undergone a far-reaching change in its contemporary security strategy, anchored in the FOIP, including landmark legislative reforms, the streamlining of its defence architecture, and a recalibration its military posture. Indeed, as part of this newly emergent 'identity', the security discourse among the strategic community has become more explicit and less prone to euphemisms: terms such as 'strike capability', 'pre-emption' and 'aircraft carriers' are no longer taboo. This development defines Japan as a more forward-leaning security actor in the Indo-Pacific region and creates greater scope for partners such as Australia to expand and deepen cooperative activities, both bilaterally and minilaterally.

However, many historically bound domestic constraints remain in place, and that should cause Australian policymakers to be cautious about what they can realistically expect their Japanese counterparts to deliver. This shouldn't be misread as a 'pacifist' stance, whatever antimilitarist sentiments are found in Japanese society. It does, however, ensure that both Australian diplomats and military commanders must be sensitive to (sometimes perplexing) legal restrictions on what Japan can and can't do politically or militarily. It also places an obligation on Australian policymakers to be at least as creative as their Japanese counterparts in working on the Japan–Australia Special Strategic Partnership, given Japanese (and Australian) constraints.

Japan has also become a more powerful military actor, making modest defence budget increases but primarily focusing on qualitative improvements. *The JSDF's military posture is geared towards countering threats to Japanese territory or interests, shaping the regional security environment and contributing to alliances and partnerships.* The intention to complete the process of building a Multi-Domain Defence Force and the acquisition of strike capabilities signal potential boosts to the JSDF's lethality and thus its contribution to deterrence. However, appearances can be deceiving. Despite rhetoric about major defence spending increases, they have yet to materialise, and, despite ambitious plans to wield a more potent military force, progress still lags behind stated aspirations in some areas and arguably remains insufficient at the current pace to match military developments around the region. Although Japan is aiming to do more for its national defence, there's no consideration of 'autonomy', detached from the US alliance, even in the defence of Japan itself. Likewise, in terms of Japanese material capabilities, how far Japan can sustain its defence reformation and military build-up as its economic growth falls behind relative to challengers remains an open question. The burning issue is whether promised drastic defence increases will now unfold as advertised.

New and emerging directions for the Australia–Japan partnership

Notably, *the previous ‘China gap’ between Japan and Australia in their approaches to Beijing now appears to have closed considerably* as a result of heightened concerns over a mix of provocative actions in the maritime space, diplomatic belligerency and entrenched economic coercion.¹²⁶ Australia and Japan could now combine their efforts towards a bilateral response to grey-zone threats, which feature in both the 2021 *Defense of Japan White Paper* and Australia's 2020 *Defence Strategic Update*. In a dedicated report, Layton argues that Australia and Japan could share intelligence on grey-zone incursions (for example, in the East China Sea) to jointly learn how to better respond.¹²⁷ He even suggests that Australia could provide crewed aircraft or UAVs to assist in intercepts (‘air policing’) over Japanese territory, on the basis of the new Reciprocal Access Agreement (‘deterrence by detection’). This could also be facilitated through greater technological cooperation, tapping into ‘fourth industrial revolution’ potentialities, for example on AI, big-data analytics and cutting-edge surveillance technologies, such as UAVs or micro/nanosatellites (under a ‘prototype warfare program’). Given the Agreement Concerning the Transfer of Defence Equipment of 2014 and the 2022 Reciprocal Access Agreement, the administrative structure is now in place to expedite such opportunities.

The same applies to *cybersecurity*. Both Australia and Japan have issued national cyber strategies (in 2021 and 2015/2020, respectively), and now conduct multiagency joint cyber policy dialogues (headed by national ambassadors for cybersecurity). This is underwritten by the 2012 Information Security Agreement, which might also be leveraged to share information on Chinese ‘influence operations’ underway in both countries. Not only can the two countries collaborate on joint approaches to cybersecurity, but they can also coordinate cyber capacity building with countries and regions of key interest as part of their activities to assist other parties to develop national resilience.¹²⁸

As *joint concern over ‘economic security’ issues* has risen in bilateral priorities, scope opens up for greater collaboration in that sphere. Both countries have experienced trade disruptions with China due to Covid-19 or been subjected to economic coercion resulting from diplomatic disputes. The 2020 leaders’ summit ‘confirmed that a key element of bilateral security cooperation is to promote coordination in the area of economic security’.¹²⁹ Sharing intelligence on countering economic coercion, creating supply-chain resilience and ensuring access to critical minerals and critical technology are all areas that the strategic partnership can productively address, based on the Japan–Australia Economic Partnership Agreement¹³⁰ and the Japan–Australia Joint Science and Technology Cooperation Committee. Ambassador Yamagami has signalled that ‘Tokyo was willing to help Australia reduce its trade dependence on China after Japan also endured rough treatment at the hands of Beijing’.¹³¹

Australia already supplies a major proportion of Japan’s raw materials and energy needs and, as Japan seeks to transition to a new mix of fuel supplies, Armstrong argues that the Japan–Australia Energy and Resources Dialogue established in 2019 ‘provides a useful building block through which to engage in Japan’s energy transition’.¹³² Japan’s INPEX Corporation has a major investment stake in the Ichthys project in the Northern Territory to supply liquefied natural gas and has encouraged Australia to develop its capacity to extract rare earths. This paves the way for greater mutual economic dependence among trusted supply sources (known as ‘ally-shoring’). Moreover, Japan has recently established the post of Economic Security Minister, which follows the introduction of economic security divisions within ministries and the National Security Secretariat.¹³³ As Armstrong further points out, the prospect of US–China technology ‘decoupling’ may also present risks for the strategic partners, especially if the US were to sanction companies trading in critical technologies in future.¹³⁴ Related to this are prospects, alluded to above, for greater defence technological collaboration based upon the Defence Technological Cooperation Agreement, including on future weapons systems.

As emphasised throughout this report, *joint participation in minilaterals* such as the TSD and the Quad (and perhaps in AUKUS) will be a crucial plank for achieving many of the priorities noted here. Although the Japanese are no doubt chagrined to some degree by their failure to secure the contract for Australia’s Future Submarine Program, the game-changing plan for the acquisition of a nuclear-powered flotilla by Australia may yet yield indirect benefits

to Japan. First, there's a possibility that Japan itself could affiliate with AUKUS, if not through participation in the submarine project, by way of quadrilateral cooperation on other defence and high-end technologies outlined in the initial agreement. Second, the appearance of a more powerful Australian maritime presence in the Indo-Pacific alongside the AUKUS partners and Japan is likely to assist in maintaining the naval military balance that Japan depends on more broadly for its regional security.

To conclude: the Australia–Japan Special Strategic Partnership has never been stronger or more active. In addition to its significant achievements to date, and the prospects for novel avenues of cooperation indicated in this report, there's an apparent appetite in Canberra and Tokyo to further formalise the strategic partnership through an update or revision of the 2007 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, while analysts in Japan have made the case for creating Australia–Japan 'defence cooperation guidelines' (on the US–Japan pattern) to further institutionalise the defence aspect of the relationship.¹³⁵ A new iteration of the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation will be another important milestone in codifying and reinforcing the strategic partnership and enhancing the security of these closely aligned nations.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
C4I	command, control, communications, computing and Intelligence
DPJ	Democratic Party of Japan
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EU	European Union
FOIP	free and open Indo-Pacific
GDP	gross domestic product
GPS	Global Positioning System
HADR	humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
ISR	intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
JASDF	Japan Air Self-Defense Force
JGSDF	Japan Ground Self-Defense Force
JMSDF	Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force
JSDF	Japan Self-Defense Forces
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MTDP	Medium Term Defense Program 2019–2023
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDPGs	<i>National Defense Program Guidelines for 2019 and beyond</i>
NTS	non-traditional security
PLA	People's Liberation Army
Quad	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
R&D	research and development
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
TSD	Trilateral Strategic Dialogue
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
UN	United Nations

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